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# Comparative analysis on Chinese FL didactics: an exploratory study into methodological approaches, teaching strategies and materials between Italy and France

Tommaso Rossi

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Università  
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## THÈSE

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dans les **Écoles Doctorales «Langues Littératures et Sciences Humaines»**  
et «**Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa**»

**Pour une analyse comparée de la  
didactique du chinois LE**  
**Une étude exploratoire des approches  
méthodologiques, des stratégies didactiques et  
des matériaux pédagogiques en Italie et en  
France**

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## **ABSTRACT** (English version)

Over the last few decades, Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has become a prominent component in French and Italian educational contexts. This increasing trend is revealed by the huge number of universities, private institutions and, in recent times, secondary schools having activated CFL courses, probably in response to the growing interest in Asian studies by learners of all ages.

Despite quite extensive research has been conducted across Europe, data on CFL teaching approaches, methodologies and techniques in Italian educational circles are still far from being exhaustive. In the mainframe of this fragmentary scenery, our exploratory study intends to look through the various didactic perspectives to CFL, comparing the Italian and the French regulatory and methodological frameworks. The choice is mainly motivated by social and cultural contiguity of the two countries, the long experimentation conducted on the French side over didactic approaches and tools, and finally, by the typological proximity of learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds with regard to CFL.

Our analysis includes two different levels of education (academic education and secondary education) in the target countries and examines the various factors having impacted on the teaching and learning processes through a comparative approach. In particular the study intends to reveal the social and historical backgrounds which contributed to discipline and standardise CFL in France and Italy, analysing players and relationships involved in teaching-learning processes. Moreover, it aims at exploring the methodological approaches and perspectives developed for CFL teaching, highlighting divergences and analogies.

As for this last point, we first considered the major approaches overtly adopted for L2 teaching over the last century, then focused on those specifically adapted to CFL teaching and learning needs, such as character thresholds (SMIC, Bellassen), character-based model (字本位) and word-based model (词本位), speaking-writing separation/disjunction (Hoa, Allanic), communicative approach, action-oriented approach (Arslangul), unipolar method (Masini) and others.

All these methodological approaches have been analysed from two angles, a theoretical angle supported by psycholinguistic, motivational and acquisitional studies, a second more pragmatic angle which focused on the way reference textbooks (*C'est du Chinois; Ni shuo ba; Le chinois...comme en Chine; Méthode d'Initiation à la Langue et à l'Écriture Chinoises; Parliamo Cinese; Parla e scrivi in cinese; Il cinese per gli italiani* etc...) and teaching practice assimilated and integrated these approaches. A great contribution to this last section has been provided by class observation, surveys and questionnaires submitted to learners, and a case study conducted on web tools.

**Key words:** Chinese as a Foreign Language, methodological approach, structuralism, formalism, communicative approach, teaching tools, language competence.

# RÉSUMÉ (version française)

Au cours des dernières décennies, le chinois langue étrangère (CLE) est devenu très présent dans les contextes éducatifs français et italien. Cette tendance croissante est reflétée par le grand nombre d'universités, d'institutions privées et, plus récemment, d'écoles secondaires qui ont mis en place des cours de CLE, pour répondre probablement à l'intérêt croissant des apprenants de tous âges pour l'étude des langues orientales.

Quand bien même des recherches assez approfondies ont été menées dans plusieurs pays européens, les études sur les approches, les méthodologies et les techniques d'enseignement/apprentissage du CLE en Italie sont loin d'être exhaustives. Dans ce paysage fragmentaire, notre étude exploratoire vise à examiner les différentes perspectives didactiques en CFL, en comparant les cadres réglementaires et les méthodologies adoptés en France et en Italie. Le choix est principalement motivé par la proximité sociale et culturelle entre les deux pays, par la longue expérimentation menée en France sur les approches et les outils didactiques, et enfin, par la proximité typologique des langues maternelles des apprenants (francophones et italophones) par rapport à une langue distante comme le chinois.

Notre analyse porte sur deux niveaux d'enseignement différents (enseignement universitaire et enseignement secondaire) dans les pays cibles et examine les différents facteurs ayant eu un impact sur l'enseignement/apprentissage du CLE en adoptant une approche comparative. L'étude vise en particulier à mettre en évidence les contextes sociaux et historiques qui ont contribué à la disciplinarisation du CLE en France et en Italie, en analysant les acteurs et les relations impliqués dans ces processus. En outre, elle vise à explorer les approches méthodologiques et les perspectives développées pour l'enseignement du CLE, en soulignant

les divergences et les analogies. En ce qui concerne ce dernier point, nous avons d'abord examiné les principales approches adoptées pour l'enseignement de la L2 au cours du siècle dernier, puis nous nous sommes concentrés sur celles qui ont été adoptées dans l'enseignement-apprentissage du CLE, notamment les seuils sinographiques (p. ex. SMIC, Bellassen), la théorie de la primauté des caractères (字本位) et la théorie de la primauté des mots (词本位) dans l'enseignement du CLE, la disjonction de l'écrit et de l'oral (Hoa, Allanic), l'approche communicative, l'approche actionnelle (Arslangul, Gabbianelli), la méthode unipolaire (Masini).

L'ensemble de ces approches ont été analysées dans deux perspectives différentes : dans une perspective théorique, pour suivre l'évolution des idées didactiques, ainsi que dans une perspective plus pragmatique, pour comprendre comment les manuels de langues parus dans les deux pays (C'est du Chinois; Ni shuo ba; Le chinois...comme en Chine; Méthode d'Initiation à la Langue et à l'écriture Chinoises; Parliamo Cinese; Parla e scrivi in cinese; Il cinese per gli italiani, entre autres) et les pratiques pédagogiques ont (ou non) intégré ces approches. La dernière partie de la thèse a, en outre, été enrichie de manière importante par l'observation en classe, les enquêtes et les questionnaires soumis aux apprenants, ainsi que par une étude de cas explorant l'impact du numérique sur l'apprentissage du CLE.

**Mots clés:** chinois langue étrangère, approche méthodologique, methodological approach, structuralisme, formalisme, approche communicative, outils pédagogiques, compétence linguistique.

# **INTRODUCTION**

Since ancient times, Asian countries and their cultures have always exerted an irresistible attraction on Western world. When talking about China, for example, we happen to dive in a mystical atmosphere, and get overwhelmed by its multi-faceted realities that have fascinated Western civilisations for centuries. Silk, pottery, *chinoiseries* and other sophisticated goods have brought to the West the scent of an old culture that only in few occasions in ancient history crossed European borders and showed up on this side of the world. Although still perceived as a very distant social and geographical reality, the aura of mystery that wrapped China for centuries has almost completely dissolved to our eyes nowadays. The West and the East have engaged in many cooperative missions that have contributed to construct what Chinese people love to call *qiaoliang* (桥梁 bridge). The mutual understanding that both cultures have reached in recent times is an evident fact to anybody. Well, we believe that a key role for this achievement has surely been played by education and language policy on both sides. In particular, language education has represented a decisive push to bridge cultural gap between China and the Western bloc. And it was right language education that more than other elements triggered us to start our research.

Actually, Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) has the double valence of being, at the same time, ancient and young. Ancient because it had already become the object of academic research and teaching back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, and has gained over the years a more and more institutional recognition and a solid position in higher and secondary education. On the other hand, it can be also considered a relatively young discipline if viewed from the perspective of teaching and learning, since its processes, approaches and methods are in an ongoing phase of construction in the West. This dualistic and fascinating condition pushed us to take an interest in CFL teaching dimension to the point of making it the *fil rouge* of

all our study. We decided to explore the factors that have denoted and connoted CFL teaching status up to its current form (if any). The most global and clearest way to go through this, we assume, is to compare the experiences of two different but close socio-cultural contexts, in which CFL has had the chance to shape into a discipline and gain a standardised position. This opportunity has been provided by Italy and France. On one side, Italy represents a very familiar context to move our steps, especially because it is the author's native country; moreover, it has been the scene of a dynamic evolution of CFL teaching approaches in recent times (in secondary education in particular), whose models, methods and policies have partially been transferred from France. In parallel, France represents another fruitful scope of investigation for the longer and more eventful experience CFL has gone through since the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. An experience that, spreading from the academy to the lower levels of education, has taken different forms in the years and has often represented a strong source of inspiration and reference for the evolution of teaching perspectives in the neighbouring countries. Another essential reason pushing us to extend the research to both the target countries is the common socio-cultural substratum and the linguistic proximity of scholars, teachers and learners in relation to the object of our analysis.

Our exploratory study intends to analyse and compare approaches and methods that have influenced and determined the constitution of CFL teaching philosophy and practice in France and Italy over the last two centuries. Particular attention has been laid to historical factors, socio-cultural pushes, language policies, teaching techniques and materials that have oriented the CFL evolutionary line and contributed to define its disciplinary and institutional status. Less priority has been given to learners' dimension in this study, we have limited ourselves to exploring the main features of learning process and the impact of determined methods and



tools onto the acquisition of specific skills. We tried to balance the analysis of theoretical and practical constituents of CFL teaching, first exploring the diverse methodological perspectives applicable to SL education, then focusing on the leading approaches having directly influenced the concept behind CFL textbooks.

Our study includes two main parts:

- The first part focuses on CFL’s “theoretical framework, historical background and institutional dimension”. It develops in three sub sections: the first one (Ch. 1) examines the current status of CFL in Europe, and delves into the two processes of disciplinisation and standardisation CFL has experienced so far. The second (Ch. 2) and the third (Ch. 3) sub sections respectively analyse the historical figures and phases that marked the evolution of CFL in France and Italy and, for any of them, observe the range of methods and materials adopted in CFL teaching.
- The second part is dedicated to a closer analysis of CFL “approaches, methods and materials” and includes four sub sections. The first one (Ch. 4) examines the actors and the factors involved in teaching and learning processes from a general perspective; the second sub section (Ch. 5) explores three influential methodological approaches to SL pedagogy and their concrete application in classroom; the third one (Ch. 6) investigates on several methods applicable to CFL teaching practice and provides a contrastive analysis of the methodological influence on textbooks; the last sub sections (Ch. 7 and 8), finally, report a study case conducted in a secondary school aimed to assess the potential impact of web tools on learning outcomes and an overview of CFL teaching practice. Although the field of our research is clearly limited to teaching dimension, we felt that it would be interesting to start exploring the

connection between teaching methodologies and learning process, an aspect on which we plan to focus more deeply in the future.

Our research intends to prove that:

1. CFL as a discipline has gained a different status in Italy and France, and this is mostly due to the different national policies and methodological experimentation phases conducted in the two countries.
2. CFL taught in schools substantially differs from academic sinology: it presents a normalised and homogeneous set of contents, its institutional recognition largely depends on national language policies and has a variety of cultural and pedagogical objectives still to be defined.
3. CFL teaching methodology has been inspired and shaped by several teaching perspectives in the years, some of them generically borrowed from SL teaching philosophy, others more specifically tailored on CFL's linguistic features and pedagogical challenges. Regardless from the different levels of experimentation between Italy and France, hybrid approaches seem to be more appreciated and adopted by compilers and teachers of both countries.

# **FIRST PART**

## **Theoretical framework, historical background and institutional dimension**

# CHAPTER 1. Definition of the discipline

## 1.1 Introduction

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed an explosion of interest in Asian languages all over the world. In particular, modern Chinese has gained a relevant position in several learning environments, mainly in secondary schools, colleges and universities. Despite its recent introduction in many educational systems, modern Chinese has globally become the first non-European language studied in high school curricula and university bachelor courses. According to a survey conducted by the Modern Language Association (MLA), Chinese language enrolments in American higher institutions increased dramatically by 51% in the time-span between 2002 and 2007, becoming the seventh most studied language in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>. This trend is not far from what happened in Europe in the last decade. Focusing in particular on the target countries of our study, the statistic survey<sup>2</sup> published in 2015 by J. Bellassen reveals that Chinese language is the fifth most studied language in French secondary education, counting over 100.000 learners of all grades and almost 600 teachers. In Italy, the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, MIUR) released the first certain data on Chinese teaching and learning trend in 2017<sup>3</sup> revealing an unexpected reality. Just few years after its introduction in the system, the number of Chinese courses almost doubled the number of Russian courses, counting up to 189 curricular classes in public secondary education and 70 corresponding chairs. These figures give evidence of the prominent position Chinese teaching and learning have gained in Italy and France in recent times; however numbers are not enough to clarify the institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Furman et al, 2007, p.18

<sup>2</sup> Source : [fcae.fr/pdf/Etat-du-chinois-DEC2015.pdf](http://fcae.fr/pdf/Etat-du-chinois-DEC2015.pdf) (21/09/2020)

<sup>3</sup> Brezzi & Lioi, 2018, p. 2-3

role that Chinese language as a discipline occupies in academic and educational contexts.

## **1.2 Western perception of oriental languages**

The family of “Oriental languages” mentioned at the top of the previous paragraph, appears somewhat vague today. It includes, in fact, a wide range of typologically different languages, whose only common point is being distant from Western languages and, to a certain extent, similar in terms of how they are taught in European educational framework. Despite the huge number of speakers, Western perspective has traditionally seen them as “rare” or “exotic” languages, whose study was for long time the exclusive preserve of scholars and literates. It was only after the 1950s that some push factors marked the turning point in how Westerns perceived this class of languages. In the case of CFL, we should distinguish between two categories of factors: on one side the geopolitical issues which have catalyzed the diffusion of Chinese language and culture all over the world; on the other the evolution and progressive redefinition of Second Language (SL) teaching and acquisition paradigms. As Klöter remarks

«In Europe and, to some extent in the United States, Chinese language courses have traditionally been integrated into sinology programs at universities [...] The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a gradual departure from the classical paradigm towards the modern spoken language and more diversity in teaching methodology and aims» (Klöter, 2017, p. 411 ).

According to this, we may assume that the advent of modern teaching philosophies could have actively contributed to bridge the epistemological gap between Chinese as a scientific discipline and Chinese as a teaching subject, thus propelling its diffusion in educational environments. As proof of this, it is interesting to notice that CFL learning community in Europe,

more specifically in Italy and France, includes a wide variety of actors: secondary schools students, university students, junior and senior amateurs, professionals in various fields and so on. Therefore, CFL teaching patterns have progressively customised in order to better fulfil the needs of such a diverse learning scenario. Unlikely in the past, CFL courses today are more widespread among non-specialised learners rather than among specialists, this tendency is probably connected to some pragmatic reasons like the improvement of occupational skills, the pursue of concrete job prospects and the opportunity for international mobility. Regardless the reasons behind learners' choices (See section 4.3.4), it is quite clear that the characteristics of the learning community have directly influenced CFL teaching approaches and methods, and have led sinologists, programme designers, textbook compilers and teachers to reconsider the role, the aims and the limits of CFL in the contemporary society.

### **1.3 Debate around the concept of “discipline”**

Several theorists have questioned about the ambiguous nature of the word “discipline”, as it may be found in very different contexts, carrying different connotations from time to time<sup>4</sup>. From the perspective of researchers and academics, the conventional sense of this word tends to relate more with the higher education than with the secondary education, without clarifying the limits between the scientific specialty confined in an academic dimension<sup>5</sup> and the school subject. In witness of this assumption, the Cambridge Dictionary defines the noun “discipline” as «a particular area of study, especially a subject studied at a college or university»<sup>6</sup>, supporting the apparent distinction between the two senses of the word “discipline”. As a second source, we can cite the Oxford Dictionary where “discipline” is considered as «a branch of knowledge, typically one studied

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<sup>4</sup> Buisson, 1887; Chervel, 1988; Reuter, 2007

<sup>5</sup> hereinafter we consider scientific disciplines and university disciplines as a single concept.

<sup>6</sup>Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discipline> (13/12/2018)

in higher education»<sup>7</sup>. In both definitions, the adverbs “especially” and “typically” do not delimit the lexical scope in a clear way, validating the underlying idea that “discipline” as an “area of study” or a “branch of knowledge” can also suit other contexts. To better define its vague semantic extent, we chose to consider the etymological origin of the word in the history of education. To do so, we decided to date back to 19<sup>th</sup> century’s definition of “discipline”, referenced in the “Dictionnaire de Pédagogie” by Ferdinand Buisson:

Ce mot, comme disciple, vient du latin *discere*, apprendre. Etymologiquement il a donc un sens étendu, il désigne à la fois le fait d’apprendre et la manière d’apprendre, come doctrine (de *docere*, enseigner) désigne à la fois l’acte d’instruire et la façon d’instruire ; puis, par une extension naturelle, discipline s’est dit parfois des choses mêmes qu’on apprend, comme doctrine des choses mêmes qu’on enseigne [ ... ] La discipline est l’ensemble des règles et des influences au moyen desquelles on peut gouverner les esprits et former les caractères. Ces moyens d’action peuvent s’exercer soit sur l’élève isolé, soit sur une réunion d’élèves (Buisson, 1887, p. 715-716)

As stated in his “Dictionnaire”, Buisson did not see the discipline as an “area of study” confined in a scientific environment quite distant from teaching and learning processes; on the contrary, he primarily underlined its pedagogical value and implications. Etymologically speaking, the word “discipline” holds an «extended» sense, being related to the act of learning itself and to the way of learning. According to Buisson indeed, the fact of identifying the “discipline” with the object (*choses*) of the learning process is only a «natural extension of the first meaning». In the wake of the same view, one century after the publication of Buisson’s Dictionnaire, Chervel

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<sup>7</sup>Source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/discipline> (13/12/2018)

in “L’histoire des disciplines scolaires. Réflexion sur un domaine de recherche” claims that the discipline is « [...] un mode de transmission culturelle qui s’adresse [...] à des élèves» (Chervel, 1988, p. 73). It is just this final restriction (*à des élèves*, to students) which marks the refusal to separate the notion of discipline from its pedagogical and educational implications, insisting on the initial sense of “discipline” provided in Buisson’s “Dictionnaire”.

The discrepancy between Buisson and Chervel’s “extended” definition of “discipline” and the one referenced in modern dictionaries brings out again the semantic ambivalence of the word, fostering the idea that scientific discipline and school discipline are none other than two sides of the same coin. From an epistemological perspective, scientific disciplines differ from school disciplines for their level of specialisation, and for not being the direct product of a national Education system. It is just for this intrinsic difference that scientific (university) disciplines legitimise the specialisation of knowledge and the emersion of new fields of research and reflexion, representing «un mode d’organisation fonctionnelle de la recherche contemporaine<sup>8</sup> ». From an educational perspective, Perrenoud believes the most evident difference between the two disciplines consists in «la forme de l’enseignement et la participation des professeurs à la construction des savoirs nouveaux» (1998, p. 490). He sheds light on the sociological and pedagogical aspects which have been shaping European educational patterns since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this definition schools are places where learning goals and social goals merge, where teachers are instructors and moral guides at the same time, where students can acquire specific knowledge and social skills. Still according to Perrenoud, European society is facing a “schooling process of university studies” (*scolarisation de l’université*) (1998, p. 498), in which

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<sup>8</sup> Blanckaert, 2012, p. 21



the educational patterns and approaches one can typically find in secondary schools have started to penetrate university bachelor courses, redefining objectives and areas of knowledge. In the last two decades, this process has made the dividing line between university and school thinner and thinner, and has partially evened out the epistemological and institutional difference of the notion of discipline.

#### **1.4 Disciplinisation of CFL**

Leaving aside the ambiguous nature of “discipline”, what emerges from the various epistemological definitions considered so far is that any organisation of discipline aims at setting a “socio-technical” framework in which knowledge is processed into operational units<sup>9</sup>. But knowledge is a living matter constantly transforming and evolving, disciplinisation is the only way to stabilise it and create a base for its dissemination and application. But what does disciplinisation process consist of? It focuses on the building blocks of each discipline but also considers their potential modifications due to institutional evolution. We must underline that any process of institutionalisation implies some socio-political involvement and power play. The consciousness of a new area of knowledge, the redefinition of an old disciplinary framework, the management of material and human resources, the management of time, these are all elements that contribute to institutionalise a discipline and, at the same time, relate to politics and public administration. To summarise, disciplinisation process needs an institutional framework to set out, and institutions cannot separate from political and economic interests. This means that the analysis of a disciplinary status must take into account the scientific aspects of a discipline and the socio-political, economic and educational dimension in which it developed.

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<sup>9</sup> Leclerc, 1989, p. 40

In our case of study, it is important to clarify whether CFL teaching is or not a separate discipline from Chinese language itself. In Europe, foreign languages were taught in the same way as any other subject, students were not supposed to acquire specific skills but simply contents, which may be converted into abilities in a second time. In other words, phonology, lexicon and grammar were taught as separate rings of the same process, it was learners' job to put them together and try to convert them into pragmatic skills. With the advent of new SL teaching approaches, the core purpose of teaching practice has become the acquisition of specific skills, such as speaking, writing, reading comprehension and listening comprehension. This is the way modern teaching approach has shaped the SL didactics and learning goals, CFL should not be an exception. Both in Italy and France, Chinese language formally started to be taught in university during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The courses were designed to give students the ability to read classical texts and not to speak the modern language: learners were mostly adult literates and experts from other sectors, professors were often specialised in ancient languages and adopted a classical methodology more applicable to dead language teaching, like Greek or Latin. It was only after the end of World War II that CFL started spreading to several French and Italian universities, with a teaching approach still consistent with the European humanistic paradigm. In the late 70s, the consolidation of diplomatic and economic relations with Far East [China], the idea of proficiency levels introduced for European languages acquisition and, eventually, the increase and popularisation of international mobility programmes have radically changed the approach to CFL, giving new importance to writing, speaking and listening skills. Another plausible reason explaining this turning point in CFL teaching and learning can consist in the fact that both in Italy and France SL didactics has an independent identity from applied linguistics. This independence comes from the Western assumption that the research in the field of

didactics investigates the teaching processes and the learning-acquisition processes, not the aspects related to the discipline itself. This vision is very distant from the way Chinese researchers perceive CFL teaching (对外汉语教学 *duìwài hànyǔ jiàoxué*). In fact, both in mainland China and Taiwan CFL didactics is closely integrated in applied linguistics, and the nature of Chinese language (汉语本体 *hànyǔ běntǐ*) remains the core object of the whole investigation process:

对外汉语教学研究的对象是汉语的学习和教学问题，那首先要把“学什么”和“教什么”研究清楚。所以，第一位是汉语本体研究。

The research object of CFL didactics consists in the problems of learning and teaching Chinese language: it is first essential to clearly answer the questions “what to learn?” and “what to teach?”. For this reason, first of all it is necessary to research the nature of Chinese language itself (Zhao Jinming 赵金铭, 1996, p. 12)

This divergence might have opened up a gap between European and Chinese visions of CFL didactics and SL didactics, paving the way for a strong differentiation of methodologies, tools, objectives, orientations and research problems. The debate around Second Language (SL) teaching as an independent discipline is relatively new, in fact SL teaching has gained its independent identity and has defined its goals and scopes only in recent times. All the fields related to language study had always been the research domain of general linguistics. The distinction between the two areas is very clear: SL teaching concentrates on the transmission of language knowledge and skills; pure linguistics and 1<sup>st</sup> generation linguistics investigate more the nature of the languages and features of language systems<sup>10</sup>. However,

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<sup>10</sup> Galisson, 1994, p.6

there is an undeniable binding force between the two research areas, lots of models and patterns produced by linguistics have been able to provide SL teaching with «effective and scientifically certain» answers for its further development<sup>11</sup>. The embarrassing question is whether or not designating linguistics as an observational discipline and SL teaching as a mere operational discipline; in other words, considering them as parallel research areas or one the sub-discipline of the other. This ambiguous relationship has been called in question several times in the last decades by French, British and Italian scholars, taking different shapes from institution to institution. The debate has not only touched the scientific dimension of the two areas (research objects, methods) and their fundamental values (goals, conceptual framework), but has also questioned about the legitimate distinction between the two fields from an academic perspective (recruitment process, faculty positioning).

### **1.5 Institutionalisation of CFL**

It is certainly difficult to determine which factors contribute to institutionalise a discipline, in the case of CFL the analysis is potentially even harder because of its heterogeneous and unstable history over the last two centuries in Europe. We believe CFL institutionalisation process essentially began when Chinese language penetrated the secondary education systems, getting the status of an official subject with a sort of formal programming. But, why is it risky to mark the beginning of CFL institutionalisation before that moment?

A bunch of reasons push us to think that, before its introduction in schools, CFL was fairly distant from the modern concept of “institutional discipline”, probably because it first spread in contexts where teaching environments, learning objectives, methodologies and target students were

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<sup>11</sup> Cuq & Gruca, 2005

profoundly different from the modern philosophies of SL acquisition. In Europe and to some extent in the United States, Chinese language courses had been traditionally integrated into sinology programs at universities. This first collocation shaped the early stages of Chinese language teaching: in fact the governing approach to SL didactics in most universities derived from the European humanist tradition. The so called “classical paradigm”<sup>12</sup>, adopted over the centuries for the analysis of ancient literature and particularly functional to dead languages, was extended to all foreign language teaching practice until the late 1980s. Chinese language was taught in the same way as Latin, Greek or Sanskrit; the classical approach, in fact, consisted in translating literary texts and diplomatic essays written in Classical Chinese. This situation remained unaltered across Europe for the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century, we believe that the most striking heritage it left behind is the profound ambiguity on the concepts of “Chinese language” and “Chinese learning” in most Western communities:

1. The first ambiguity concerns what is referred to as “Chinese language” in learning environments. As said, in the first stages of CFL history in Europe, the Chinese studied in universities and colleges was not modern standard Chinese (普通话 *pǔtōnghuà*), not even a variant of modern Chinese, but it was Classical Chinese (文言文 *wényánwén*). *Wenyanwen* is a language used for the composition of classics, appeared in the first millennium B.C., standardised under Qin dynasty and flourishing under Han dynasty. It represents the language model for any written composition until the 20<sup>th</sup> century but is very distant from modern standard Chinese, especially from its spoken variant(s). As McDonald points out «this classical paradigm has its roots in the European and Chinese traditions of study of their respective classics. Both of these traditions were reading traditions,

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<sup>12</sup> Klöter, 2017, p. 411

where students were initiated into the study of a canon of works written in a literary language, distinct from the vernacular, the mastery of which thus required special training» (2011, p. 43). So, in a time where communication was not a core objective and the exchanges between East and West were limited, university courses named “Chinese language” and offering the translation of classics written in wenyanwen somehow reinforced the misleading idea that Chinese language and Classical Chinese were just two names for the same thing. The clarification of their profoundly different entities came after the II World War, when SL teaching philosophy progressively abandoned the classical paradigm and drifted towards the modern spoken language and a more diversified range of teaching methods and aims.

2. The second ambiguity is around the concept of “learning (and teaching) Chinese”. McDonald remarks that «those parts of Chinese programs influenced by the classical paradigm provide relatively little structured teaching of the language» (2011, p. 46). From a methodological perspective, the teaching paradigm of Classical Chinese conventionally focused on two key elements: a) the explanation of function words (虚词 *xūcí*) and syntax ; b) the translation of classics into Western languages. In other words, “grammar-translation method” (语法翻译法 *yǔfǎ fānyìfǎ*) was the only methodology used to teach Chinese language at the time. It consisted of three phases: firstly, read classical passages, trying to respect intonation and rhyming schemes; secondly, analyse and comment grammar patterns and content by means of professor’s native language (NL)<sup>13</sup>; thirdly, give a translation of the passage in students’ NL. If we compare this process with the new SL teaching

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<sup>13</sup> Until the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Chinese professors in Europe were not native speakers (Antonucci, Zuccheri, 2010)

philosophies developed around 1980s, we can see a couple of methodological aspects doomed to disappear along the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the little exposure to the target language (SL) during class activities and the adoption of the grammar-translation methodology which did not promote communicative abilities but, conversely, extended the interdependence phase between NL and SL. The classical paradigm crystallised the methodology of “teaching/learning Chinese” for almost two centuries in most European universities, and fostered the idea that learning a foreign language meant mastering grammar functions and being able to translate its literary works. It was only after the contributions of some scholars<sup>14</sup> that CFL teaching approach started a radical change. New theories about language structure, use and acquisition paved the way for some innovative teaching methodologies which pushed modern spoken Chinese to gradually gain ground over the classical paradigm. The structuralism first, and the pragmatism later started to give high consideration to the communicative competence in foreign languages, providing solid theoretical background for the development of the new communicative approach (交际法 *jiāojìfǎ*). This turning point in SL teaching philosophy did not only impose a reflection on methodology, but it also contributed to reshaped the roles of teachers and students. The teacher was no longer a knowledge holder but a language facilitator, students were no longer the target of the teaching action but the performers of their own learning process.

Moving from the theoretical framework to the common practice, what we can observe is that the leading CFL teaching methodology in

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<sup>14</sup> Yuan Ren Chao (Mandarin Primer, 1948; Grammar of Spoken Chinese, 1964); John DeFrancis (Beginning Chinese, 1963; Beginning Chinese reader, 1966; Character text for Intermediate Chinese, 1965). They can be actually considered precursors of this paradigmatic change, Chao’s “Mandarin Primer” and DeFrancis manuals served as reference tools for the progressive introduction of innovative methodologies in Chinese L2 teaching framework.

European universities today is extremely hybrid, in other words, it tends to merge elements from different approaches: grammar-translation, classical, communicative, authentic-task based. Moreover, factors like the articulation of courses, the adoption of particular teaching strategies and tools, the choice of specific textbooks and the exposure to mother-tongue teachers contributed to highly diversify CFL teaching community, especially at university level. Diversify to which extent? To the extent that, paradoxically, different CFL university programmes in the same country do not set the same learning goals, do not provide the same teaching time per credit, do not guarantee the same proficiency standards for their students. The analysis of this situation brings us back to the question raised at the top of this section: why is it risky to mark the beginning of CFL institutionalisation before its introduction in secondary schools? If universities offering similar courses and programmes on paper, show such heterogeneous realities both in methodology and in daily practice, well we believe they are not a reliable and stable context where CFL can obtain institutionalisation. Unlike universities, secondary schools are *de facto* subject to ministerial-level policies, they stick to national syllabuses determining contents and proficiency levels, they tend to coordinate efforts to guarantee the achievement of standard outcomes, and they jointly programme in advance their activities. We think these conditions make secondary school a normalised context, able to ensure epistemological stability and territorial homogeneity for a discipline institutionalisation. For this, we identify the beginning of CFL institutionalisation process with the introduction of CFL in secondary education.

The advent of CFL in secondary education system occurred in different times in Italy and France, went through different phases and involved different actors, in a word, it mirrors the responses of two completely different institutional contexts. However, the analysis of CFL



school syllabuses in France (1979 – 2010) and in Italy (2009 – 2016) proves that both countries first of all aimed to normalise contents, knowledge and expected outcomes. Despite coping with different pressures and needs, both countries set as a priority the definition of “CFL as a discipline”. To do so, the ministerial policies had to comply with the concrete educational needs of target students in the two countries, without overlooking the epistemological basis of Chinese language.

### **1.6 Standardisation of foreign language teaching in Europe**

Foreign language teaching in Italy and France, despite having moved to fairly different directions today, has been subject to similar historic pressures and influences. The major elements having impacted on it are:

1. The first is the introduction and the consequent popularisation of foreign languages<sup>15</sup> in public education. Foreign languages taught in State schools have changed according to their geopolitical influence over the decades. Just to cite an example: at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the most widely taught language in Italy was French, while, few years later most of the chairs went to English; in the second half of 1990s instead a considerable number of chairs were established for Spanish and German. English, French, Spanish and German represented the four vehicular languages of European space, so they were commonly taught in the majority of State schools. The first introduction of “non vehicular” languages<sup>16</sup> in Italian public education dates back to the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, when Russian and Chinese made their shy apparition in some pioneering high schools. Regardless of trends and fashions, the introduction of

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<sup>15</sup> *Langues Vivantes* (LV) in French; *Lingue Straniere* (LS) in Italian

<sup>16</sup> A vehicular language (*lingua franca*) is considered as “any language that is widely used as a means of communication among speakers of other languages” (Thesaurus). In Western education, the vehicular languages found in school and university curricula were actually those languages able to provide the widest range of comprehension and international communication, that is to say English and French. Only at a later time, Spanish and German joined the group.

foreign languages in State education in 19<sup>th</sup> century, like it or not, upgraded them to the position of compulsory disciplines, spurring the democratisation process and the modernisation of teaching approaches and practice in secondary schools.

2. The second element corresponds to the orientation of foreign language policies, which has paid particular attention to the processes of diversification and effectiveness of foreign language teaching. During the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century the Council of Europe and, later, the European Union started questioning the role of languages and cultures in the cohesion of countries. It is under this impulse, that France, Italy, Spain and some other countries engaged on *Plurilingual and Intercultural Education* projects. The first conference was held in Paris in 1959 to establish a common policy on foreign languages, the actors joined their efforts to establish and generalise the position of foreign languages in secondary and technical education. During the second conference (Hamburg, 1961), European Ministers of Education wished to rely on the studies carried out by the Council of Europe to design some common measures for foreign language teaching and learning. To respond to this urgent need, in 1962 the Council for Cultural Cooperation was finally founded (Resolution n. IV), the supervision on foreign language policies and didactics was then assigned to a specific unit in charge, part of the direction board.
3. The third and, we believe, most relevant contribution to the present situation was carried out by the introduction of Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR stands for a real watershed in foreign language education and assessment, since it defines for the first time stable criteria for language proficiency based on specific skills. The CEFR broadens the perspective of language education in a number of ways, not least by its vision of

the user/learner as a social agent, co-constructing meaning in interaction, and by the notions of mediation and plurilingual / pluricultural competences. The CEFR has proved successful precisely because it encompasses educational values, a clear model of language-related competences and language use, and practical tools, in the form of illustrative descriptors, to facilitate the development of curricula and orientation of teaching and learning. CEFR descriptors scale overall language competence onto six progressive levels, ranging from level group A (basic user), to level group B (independent user) to level group C (proficient user). According to this testing philosophy, language user is assessed through four types of language activities (reception, production, interaction and mediation) and his or her general proficiency basically includes knowledge, specific skills and existential competences (linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic ones). Since CEFR started to circulate in Europe in 2001, a couple of tools have been conceived for assisting language education policies. The first consists of providing member States with self-assessment tools (Council of Europe, 2014), in this way volunteering countries had the chance to self evaluate their language policy and the proficiency levels achieved under the supervision of European experts. The second tool is the elaboration of the Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe (abbr. Guide), more oriented to political actors and education managers. The content of this document was based on the findings of several research projects carried out in Europe in the previous decade, it aimed to define a global framework comprising the open questions on multilingual education. The Guide promotes a holistic approach to language education, whose ultimate purpose is to reconsider the teaching policies of the different foreign languages as a coherent whole.

Foreign languages should no longer be taught separately, the Guide recommends to build up a system of synergies and convergences able to align foreign languages, native languages, regional or minority languages and migration languages into a single comprehensive dimension. It is in the wake of these newborn didactic, educational and political pressures that the Council of Europe conceives the concept of intercultural and multilingual education and promotes a methodology to language teaching based on action-learning approach:

«The CEFR's action-oriented approach represents a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a predetermined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions. This promotes a proficiency perspective guided by 'Can do' descriptors rather than a deficiency perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired. The idea is to design curricula and courses based on real world communicative needs, organized around real-life tasks and accompanied by 'Can do' descriptors that communicate aims to learners. Fundamentally, the CEFR is a tool to assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations by working backwards from what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language. The provision of a comprehensive descriptive scheme containing illustrative 'Can do' descriptor scales for as many aspects of the scheme as proves feasible, plus associated content specifications published separately for different languages (= Reference Level Descriptions: RLDs) is intended to provide a basis for such planning.» (Common European Framework of Reference for

Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion  
Volume with new Descriptors, 2018, p. 26)<sup>17</sup>

After almost 20 years since its publication in 2001 (European Year of Languages), the CEFR has been made available in 40 different languages and represents one of the best known and most used policy instruments for language education. Such an engagement in language policy started as a means to guarantee international understanding, promote lifelong learning and increase the quality of language education in schools. It is clear that language education is essential to effectively enjoy the right to education and to other human rights (the rights of minorities for example), as well as to ensure quality inclusive education as a right for all citizens. In 2018, the Education Policy Division (Language Policy Programme) of the Council of Europe launched a further project aimed at promoting quality in FL/SL teaching and learning as well as enhancing plurilingual and intercultural education: we are talking about the CEFR Companion Volume. It is meant to become an integration to the CEFR, without altering its original status though. The Companion Volume project intends to update the CEFR illustrative descriptors by several actions, listed in the Volume's info sheet:

«[...] 1. highlighting certain innovative areas of the CEFR for which no descriptor scales had been provided in the 2001 set of descriptors, but which have become increasingly relevant over the past twenty years, especially mediation and plurilingual / pluricultural competence; 2. building on the successful implementation and further development of the CEFR, for example by more fully defining 'plus levels' and a new 'Pre-A1' level; 3. responding to demands for more elaborate description of listening and reading in existing scales, and for descriptors for other communicative activities such as online interaction, using

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<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989> (25/09/2020)

telecommunications, expressing reactions to creative text and literature; 4. enriching the description at A1, and at the C levels, particularly C2.» (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume with new Descriptors, 2018, p. 23)<sup>18</sup>

In brief, the Companion Volume integrates the existing descriptor scales with new illustrative ones and provides schematic tables grouping the scales belonging to the same category (e.g. communicative language activities, competences). The push this project has given to language policy in Europe, we believe, has substantially contributed to further define the features of a democratic, highly inclusive and transparent approach to language education. Concretely, the guidelines included in the Volume have impacted on the rapid disciplinisation and normalisation of contents, assessment criteria and methods to European language teaching. The influence exerted in this way ended up affecting the methodological approaches to emerging languages as well, like Chinese, Arabic and Japanese.

### **1.7 Attempt to standardise CFL**

Among European countries, Italy and France were probably the first national systems to adopt a modern language teaching pattern whose reference guidelines were, precisely, the policies released by Council of Europe. Zooming in onto our research field, we ought to say these policies were originally exclusively conceived for European languages -flexive and alphabetical- whose cultural background is deeply rooted in European historic substrate. An open debate is whether these policies can or not be applied to Chinese as well, and, if they can, to which extent of compatibility. The question, tackled by several academic communities in

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<sup>18</sup> Source : <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989> (25/09/2020)

Europe and in mainland China, concerns two main aspects: on one side the particular morphology, phonology and syntax of Chinese language which directly affect learning time and acquisition outcomes, especially in European language speaking countries; on the other side the ability to assess Chinese language proficiency with the same testing criteria adopted for European languages, regardless of interlinguistic gap, typological distance and discrepancies in language teaching approach. In the last two decades, a partial response to this debate has been provided by HSK on one side, and by EBCL on the other (which will be further developed in section 3.8). HSK (汉语水平考试, *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*) is a standardised proficiency test of Chinese language, administered by Hanban<sup>19</sup> especially conceived for non-native speakers and overseas Chinese people. Its first development phase began at Beijing Language and Culture University in 1984 and in 1992 the test was finally standardised and released out of mainland China. According to Hanban standard criteria, the test is solely administered in Standard Chinese (普通话 *Pǔtōnghuà*), written in simplified characters (简体字 *jiǎntǐzì*), although candidates taking paper-based test can also use traditional characters. The test is conceived to assess three separate skills, respectively listening comprehension (听力理解 *tīnglì lǐjiě*), reading comprehension (阅读理解 *yuèdú lǐjiě*) and, from level 3 onwards, also writing ability (书写 *shūxiě*)<sup>20</sup>. A controversial point about HSK testing philosophy concerns the absence of speaking ability items, which are treated in a separate test, HSKK, whose three proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) correspond in pairs to the six levels administered in HSK.

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<sup>19</sup> Hanban (汉办) abbreviation for 国家汉语国际推广领导小组办公室 (*guójiā hànyǔ guójì tuīguǎng lǐngdǎo xiǎozǔ bàngōngshì*), Office of Chinese Language Council International, an agency of RPC Ministry of Education.

<sup>20</sup> Source: [english.hanban.org/node\\_8002.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_8002.htm) (01/03/2019)

**Table 1**

*Hanban equivalency table HSK-CEFR<sup>21</sup>*

二、考试等级			
新 HSK 各等级与《国际汉语能力标准》《欧洲语言共同参考框架 (CEF)》的对应关系如下表所示:			
新 HSK	词汇量	国际汉语能力标准	欧洲语言框架 (CEF)
HSK (六级)	5000 及以上	五级	C2
HSK (五级)	2500		C1
HSK (四级)	1200	四级	B2
HSK (三级)	600	三级	B1
HSK (二级)	300	二级	A2
HSK (一级)	150	一级	A1

*Source: Hanban*

A second, even more debated aspect is the correspondence between HSK levels and CEFR levels. As shown in Table 1, the equivalence HSK-CEFR elaborated by Hanban and included in HSK official syllabus, establishes a direct biunivocal correspondence between the six HSK proficiency levels and the six levels of competence in CEFR, as follows: HSK1 – A1; HSK2 – A2; HSK3 – B1; HSK4 – B2; HSK5 – C1; HSK6 – C2). Over the last decade, some Chinese language teaching communities have called into question this equivalency, especially because of the different testing philosophies endorsed by European framework and Hanban. The major discrepancies concern aspects, such as the tested abilities (since Hanban does not test speaking ability and contemplates writing ability only from level 3 onwards), the assessment criteria and proficiency level descriptors, and the tendency to stick to vocabulary lists

<sup>21</sup> Source: [www.chinesetest.cn/userfiles/file/dagang/HSK-koushi.pdf](http://www.chinesetest.cn/userfiles/file/dagang/HSK-koushi.pdf) (08/03/2019)



and lexemes/characters number as governing principle for language competence assessment.

Among the several objections overtly and covertly raised by Chinese language communities in Europe and US, we do believe the most relevant argumentation is the one stated in 2010 by Chinese Language Teacher's Association of Germany, Austria and Switzerland<sup>22</sup> (德语区汉语教学协会, Fachverband Chinesisch e.V.<sup>23</sup>) in the document “德语区汉语教学协会对新汉语水平考试的几项说明” (Clarifications of Chinese Language Teacher's Association of Germany, Austria and Switzerland on new HSK test). The most prominent objections against the direct correspondence between HSK and CEFR levels refer to two areas in particular: lexical competence requirements and study time.

-至今为止所有外语教学界对词汇量的要求是：A1级约500个，A2级约1000个，B2级约2000个<sup>1</sup>。新汉语水平考试给人这样的错觉，似乎汉语只需其他语种的三分之一的词汇量就能达到同样的技能水平。

- Up to now, the lexical competence requirements in any foreign language teaching context have been as follows: about 500 words for A1 level; about 1000 words for A2 level; about 2000 words for B2 level. The illusion new HSK test gives is that a CFL learner would need one third of vocabulary items compared to other foreign language learners to attain the same proficiency level.

-汉办官方资料认为，外国学生经过每周2到4个学时、两个学年的学习（在德国总学时约为160-320个学时），汉语水平即可达到 B2（HSK4）水平。这甚至在欧洲语言范围内也

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<sup>22</sup> Abbr : FaCh

<sup>23</sup> Source: [www.fachverband-chinesisch.de/cn/](http://www.fachverband-chinesisch.de/cn/) (21/03/2019)

是无法实现的。根据本协会2005年的决议，汉语水平要想达到与《欧洲语言共同参考框架》相应的口语及书面语的B2水平，则需要1200至1600个学时（自学时间另加）。

- According to Hanban official data, foreign students of Chinese language would be able to almost reach B2 level (HSK4) after two school years, 2 to 4 study hours per week (in Germany the annual study hours amount to approximately 160-320). This outcome cannot be realised even in European languages. According to a resolution defined in 2005 by our Association, Chinese language learners would need between 1200 and 1600 study hours (plus self-study time) to acquire the same oral and written competence as a B2 level of proficiency according to CEFR.

The Association gives reasons to assume the correspondence set by Hanban has not taken into account two significant variables meant to compromise language achievement: vocabulary size and study time. To further clarify this point, in the document footnote nr.1 removes any ambiguity on what is referred to as vocabulary (词汇 *cíhuì*):

备注：“词汇”不能等同于“字汇”。《新实用汉语课本》第一册到第四册所用汉字约为1200个，词汇量为2500左右。

Remark: “word vocabulary” is not equivalent to “character vocabulary”. In the first four volumes of “New Practical Chinese Reader” the number of Chinese characters used is about 1200, whilst the number of words used amounts to 2500 approximately.

By this remark, the Association reconsiders the role of words in pragmatic communication. Drawing a simple statistic figure from one of the most used textbooks in Western learning communities, they wish to prove that

CFL learners rely much more on words (lexemes), rather than on characters or morphemes to carry out language tasks both within and outside the learning environment. For this reason, the number of single characters (单字 *dānzi*) presented in textbooks is way lower than the amount of compound words to master for daily communication.

According to the objections raised, the Association suggests a new equivalency table, in which language exposure, study time and vocabulary size directly affect language outcomes, thus establishing a new scale of correspondence with CEFR levels (See Table 2).

**Table 2**

*FaCh equivalency table HSK-CEFR*

新汉语水平考试等级 词汇量	(新汉语水平考试文献所认 定的《框架》等级)	德语区汉语教学协会 认定的《框架》等级
新汉语水平考试 一级 词汇量150个 (只需汉语拼音)	(A1)	无
新汉语水平考试 二级 词汇量300个 (只需汉语拼音)	(A2)	A1.1 (不含汉字)
新汉语水平考试 三级 词汇量600个	(B1)	A1
新汉语水平考试 四级 词汇量1200个	(B2)	A2
新汉语水平考试 五级 词汇量2500个	(C1)	B1
新汉语水平考试 六级 词汇量5000个以上	(C2)	B2

*Source: Hanban*

In the last decade, new HSK test has strongly spread across over 120 countries, and has faced realities governed by different assessment scales and testing philosophies. Despite a series of solicitations and requests coming from several countries across the globe, Hanban does not really

seem to have accepted any suggestion to scale down its levels or align with CEFR proficiency criteria in a more reasonable way. However, in May 2020 Hanban announced via the official HSK Twitter Account that a new formula of the exam would soon be released, the so called New HSK 3.0 Exam. No precise news has leaked at the moment, apparently the exam will change from six to nine levels. To track the examinees' current progress in a capillary way, the nine levels will be sub-divided into three stages, which are in sequence: beginner levels 1-3, intermediate levels 4-6, and advanced levels 7-9. Another innovative aspect is that the advanced levels (7-9) are for foreign students who want to specialize in Chinese language and literature or other majors related to Sinology<sup>24</sup>.

Still considering the current version of exam, we can say that today HSK has become more than a simple proficiency test, it is not rare, in fact, to see it as language entry requirement for international universities, or to see CFL learning outcomes in universities and high schools scaled on to its levels of proficiency. This reality can partially prove that HSK has, *de facto*, turned into a sort of universal language reference scale, regardless of the debates on its adherence to European framework. If on one side HSK acts as -or is perceived as- a supra-national standard for CFL directly conceived from mainland China, on the other side each local and national education system has drawn up its own standard, on which teaching communities rely for their short-term and long-term educational planning actions. As stated at the top of this section, academic realities across Europe looks hugely diverse, university curricula structures may vary from country to country, even from campus to campus. Within the same university context, it is not so rare to see differences between bachelor and master degree orientations, or from courses designed for “specialised” audience to courses for “non specialised” audience. Curricula may also present very different learning

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<sup>24</sup> <https://lfl-school.com/> (28/10/2020)

objectives: sometimes they focus upon Chinese language and linguistics, sometimes on Chinese literature and culture, some other times on Chinese language for specific purposes. It is, thus, rather hard to find out a crystal clear guideline, even within a single academic reality, to be taken as a national standard. Secondary institutions, whereas, being subject to stronger national policies and control, have been moving along a disciplinisation process, whose ultimate goal is to standardise knowledge and learning outcomes. Chinese language has gained a relevant position among secondary school disciplines both in Italy and France, although the two countries, along the years, have implemented different policies, relied on different philosophies, and laid stress on different methodologies and tools. Today, Chinese language scenarios in Italy and France differ in a number of aspects, ranging from Second Language teaching and acquisition theoretical approaches, to CFL disciplinisation, teaching methodologies and materials. We believe that a good comprehension of teaching philosophies and applied methodologies in the two countries should necessarily begin from outlining the historical background and the institutional dimension in which Chinese as a Foreign Language has its roots.

## CHAPTER 2. CFL history in France

### 2.1 Institutional framework

By the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, China and Chinese language were no longer the mysterious realities described by Marco Polo 500 years before. More precisely, in France the first glimpse of Chinese language dates back to 16<sup>th</sup> century and, since then, the common interest has continued to increase. The knowledge of China and Chinese language has gone through three main developing phases. The first relevant moment, in the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century, was marked by the apparition of the first dictionaries, grammars and primers compiled by Portuguese, Italian and Spanish missionaries; these documents brought some general but yet empirically based knowledge to European cultural communities. The following century was the setting for the creation of the “*Mission Française*”, which literally sparked a strong and quite long debate around Chinese rituals (*Querelle des rites*) where scholars argued about ethical and moral issues connected to Chinese culture, trying to discern the cultural compatibility between Far East and the West. It is exactly over these few decades that several exotic items and publications in unknown languages brought from Asia aroused public interest in Chinese sphere. A particular attraction was registered in the intellectual circles, where profane scholars who had never set foot in Asia before, embarked on comparative dissertations and reflections, building up the ideal substratum for an orientalist climate ruling upon the whole 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the strong interest in Chinese culture since the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, France could not get Chinese language teaching institutionalised until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, since then, the Government has somehow guaranteed its continuity within its national education system. To tackle with the analysis of Chinese FL evolution in France we mainly drew

inspiration from the theoretical line chosen by Zhang Ying in her PhD research (2016). As she highlighted in her work, we also consider the creation of three academic chairs<sup>25</sup> between 1814 and 1913 the fact that more than any others triggered and processed the institutionalisation of Chinese language teaching in French context. The chairs we are going to focus on are, in order:

- the first chair in French history is the one established at Collège de France in 1814 named “Langue et littérature chinoises et tartares-mandchoues”, assigned to Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat;
- the second chair deserving our attention is the one in “Chinois vulgaire” (vulgar Chinese), assigned in 1843 to Antoine Bazin at the Ecole spéciale des langues orientales vivantes;
- the third chair we ought to consider is the one established at the Université de Lyon in 1913, where the first tenured professor was Maurice Courant.

Before going through the features of these three institutional positions, it is urgent to underline how difficult it is to describe the evolution of Chinese language knowledge along 19<sup>th</sup> century, an aspect that Zhang Ying herself has underlined several times in her research. In a way, Chinese was itself a new research field at the time, scholars could not rely on a pragmatic knowledge of the language, not even could refer to a normalised grammar framework. Concepts, terms and views on the language were unstable, changing in form and substance from period to period. Probably this fluctuating reality somehow mirrored the fast evolution Chinese language was facing between 19<sup>th</sup> century and PRC foundation, as underlined by Bergère and Pino «la langue chinoise elle-même s’était trouvée profondément métamorphosée<sup>26</sup> ».

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<sup>25</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 104

<sup>26</sup> Bergère & Pino, 1995, p. 213

## 2.2 The Collège de France: Abel-Rémusat

Since its foundation in 1530, the Collège de France had always been a peculiar institution as it welcomed several disciplines normally rejected by ordinary universities, such as exotic languages and cultures. As claimed by its motto *Docet omnia* (it teaches everything), the number of disciplines taught at the Collège increased quite fast, by the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century in fact, the institution counted over twenty chairs, comprising also some Asian languages (Turkish, Persian and Syriac) which made their first apparition in the academic offer plan in 1538. During the revolution, the Collège was spared because of its fundamentalist progressism, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century it continued its booming growth in terms of quantity (number of chairs) and quality (research depth in several fields), proving to be a pioneering research centre in several sciences. Among the different research fields introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two new domains officially joined Collège's syllabus in 1814: Sanskrit and Chinese, whose chairs were respectively conferred to L. de Chézy and J. Abel-Rémusat<sup>27</sup>.

Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832), commonly considered the founder of “scientific sinology” (Le Blanc, 2007), was a great philologist of Asian languages and the first Chinese language tenured professor in European education systems. The factors which mostly contributed to shape his original view of the relationship between language and script are: on one hand, his mastery of European languages and philology, on the other hand, his knowledge of some Asian languages, such as Japanese, Korean, Tartar idioms and, above all, Chinese. His genius for languages went over the passion for literature and culture, in fact in several occasions he manifested a profound interest in pedagogical issues: his willingness to simplify and facilitate Chinese learning process can be evidently seen in a number of projects he personally went through, from dictionaries drafts to

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<sup>27</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 111



grammar works. Abel-Rémusat had learnt Chinese language on his own, making great efforts to attain some results, one of his biggest regrets was actually the fact he had not had the chance to take up Chinese by the “*méthode naturelle*”<sup>28</sup> (natural method). Since his first publication on Chinese, *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises* (1811), Abel-Rémusat underlined the urgency for a rational method when learning Chinese:

«Il est effectivement un assez grand nombre des règles élémentaires relatives à la langue, à l’écriture, à la forme et à la variété des caractères, au mécanisme de leur composition et de leur analyse, il est, dis-je, une foule de considérations préliminaires, indispensables pour l’étude du chinois.» (1811, p. 5)

There is a quite great number of elementary rules connected to language, script, form and variety of characters, to the mechanism of their composition and their analysis; I think there is a ‘crowd’ of preliminary considerations, (which turn out to be) indispensable to Chinese language study.

Although a great deal of Abel-Rémusat’s publications witnessed his great attention to didactics and its dynamics, once taken up his chair, his teaching approach rejected a clear distinction between the language study and the study of Chinese culture or thinking, he tended to merge sinological studies and the comprehension of Chinese language mechanisms. Despite foreign language didactics has a long and multifaceted history, Chinese language teaching did not get an institutional dimension before 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, which made Chinese a sort of virgin land where finding pedagogical references or linguistic models was a real challenge.

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| <sup>28</sup> Letter to *Journal Asiatique*, 1822, p. 26

### 2.2.1 Abel-Rémusat's view of Chinese language and script

Abel-Rémusat had literally to fight against the common tendency to generalisation, risky inferences, prejudice and beliefs which represented huge epistemological obstacles to a transparent knowledge of language and culture. One of the major limits he had to overcome was the vague relationship between Chinese and European languages, therefore, the first goal his chair had to work on was to lay foundations for an independent new discipline:

«Presque tout était à réformer dans cette matière, depuis les notions les plus vulgaires qu'on s'était faites de l'écriture et du langage, jusqu'aux opinions qui avaient cours au sujet de l'esprit philosophique et du génie littéraire de la nation chinoise.» (Abel-Rémusat, « Avvertissement », in *Mélanges Asiatiques*, 1826, p. 22)

Almost everything had to be reformed about this discipline, from the most vulgar beliefs one could have figured out about writing and language, to the opinions connected to the philosophy and literature of Chinese nation.

Although time was not ripe enough for clearly defining Chinese language, script and culture, Abel-Rémusat deserves huge merit for having clarified some mechanisms of Chinese language and paved the way for further investigation on its common points with other languages. According to Abel-Rémusat's publication, we can infer three essential propositions about his view of Chinese language nature<sup>29</sup>:

- Chinese is a natural language, product of society and culture;
- Chinese is a coherent language, having its own grammar;

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<sup>29</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 115

- Chinese language is polysyllabic, Chinese script relies on monosyllabic units.

Abel-Rémusat conception of the language appears quite similar to the one adopted later on by De Saussure<sup>30</sup>: speech and language are two autonomous but interconnected entities, the first contributes to shape ideas and concepts in human mind, the second is a socio-cultural *medium* designed to attain communicative goals. A common belief spread among European scholars and linguists, especially W. Humboldt, consisted in the supremacy of European languages over Chinese, thanks to their rigorous grammar structures. Whereas Chinese got downgraded to the status of a primitive language as it was apparently devoid of any grammatical form, thus unable to properly express human thinking. Abel-Rémusat refuted these false beliefs, claiming Chinese language had proved to perfectly meet human life needs. Chinese people in fact understand each other with the same ease German or French people may have; in addition, Chinese language “reckons a huge number of speakers in the Far East as well as boasting the richest and widest literature in Asia”<sup>31</sup>.

Abel-Rémusat underlined the necessity to distance himself from European language models to really discern the inner nature of Chinese language. An example may be represented by contrastive morphology: while some scholars claimed Chinese could not be classified into the same morphological categories as done for European languages, Abel-Rémusat refuted this position:

« [Dans la langue chinoise] les rapports des mots, les cas, les nombres, les genres, les modes, le tems, les personnes, s’y distinguent autant qu’il est nécessaire, par des articles, des

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<sup>30</sup> De Saussure, 1967

<sup>31</sup> Loosely translated from Abel-Rémusat, Sur la naissance des formes grammaticales de Humboldt, in *Mélanges Asiatiques*, 1822

pronoms, des désinences [...] comme dans les autres langues, et surtout par la position relative des différentes parties de la phrase ; et quoique les mêmes termes servent souvent à représenter les noms, les adjectifs et les verbes, on y distingue toujours les parties du discours assez facilement [...] .» (Abel-Rémusat, « Sur la nature monosyllabique attribuée communément à la langue chinoise », in *Mélanges Asiatiques*, 1826, p. 56)

[In Chinese language] the relationships among words, cases, numbers, genders, moods, themes, persons can be distinguished as much as necessary through articles, pronouns, desinences [...] as one can do in other languages, and, especially, through the corresponding position of the different parts in the sentence; despite the same terms often act as nouns, adjectives and verbs, it is always possible to distinguish them quite easily [...] .

Apparently, in Abel-Rémusat's opinion there are some relevant fundamentals which have laid important foundations for our common knowledge of Chinese morphology, in particular the ideas of word positioning and word multi-functionality. As a matter of fact, he believed that "Chinese people have in their mind a right conception of grammar categories" (Abel-Rémusat, "Observation sur quelques passages de la lettre précédente" in *Journal Asiatique*, 1827), even though the concrete grammatical forms were kindly different from European ones. These remarks are clearly supported in his work "Éléments de la grammaire chinoise" published in 1822, comprising 413 items.

His first assumptions on Chinese language started from the mere morphology and progressively gave way to a more complex conception where language and script necessarily merged. He still claimed the

polysyllabic nature of Chinese language, not so distant from that of other natural living languages, while Chinese writing system relied on a rigid monosyllabic structure. This fact made written language and oral language profoundly different as for production and reception. Moreover, Chinese script was subsequent to language constitution, as characters were subsequent to words<sup>32</sup>. Thus, spoken language is made of words which are commonly polysyllabic, their further transcription into characters tends to hide this aspect by monosyllabism.

« [...] les caractères chinois se réunissent souvent plusieurs ensemble pour exprimer des noms et des idées simples, et forment, par leur jonction, des expressions qui sont composées de caractères, comme les mots des langues latine ou française sont composés de syllabes. Cette réunion peut avoir lieu de plusieurs manières sur chacune desquelles il est nécessaire de dire quelques mots. [...] Quelques écrivains, parmi lesquels Fourmont occupe le premier rang, ont considéré la langue chinoise comme étant l'invention de quelques philosophes qui en ont par la suite communiqué l'usage à leur nation, et regardant les caractères comme antérieurs aux mots, et par conséquent l'écriture comme préexistante au langage, ils ont fait, des termes de la langue parlée, l'expression des caractères ou leur nom, si j'ose ainsi parler : en cela ces auteurs me semblent avoir interverti l'ordre naturel. [...] N'est-il pas beaucoup plus vraisemblable de supposer qu'il y avait chez les Chinois, avant l'invention des caractères, une langue composée de mots, sinon tous monosyllabiques, au moins très courts [...] puisqu'en demandant à un Chinois non lettré les noms des objets les plus simples, il est impossible qu'il ne se rencontre dans ses réponses

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<sup>32</sup> Although Abel-Rémusat still ignored the conceptual distinction between morpheme and phoneme, as claimed by the functionalist Martinet, he carried out a reflection on the smallest significant lexical units.

un grand nombre de mots qu'on devra prendre pour de véritables polysyllabes, si l'on ne considère que la langue et l'oreille sans avoir égard aux caractères.» (Abel-Rémusat, *Mélanges Asiatiques*, 1826, p. 59-60)

[...] Chinese characters often join together to express nouns or simple ideas, and by their junction they build up expressions made by characters, (exactly) as Latin or French are composed by syllables. [...] Isn't it much more likely to suppose that Chinese people, before the invention of characters, had a language made of words, if not all monosyllabic, at least very short [...] since, asking a non lettered Chinese the names of very simple objects, it is impossible not to find in his/her responses a huge number of polysyllabic words, especially if merely considering the language and the ear, disregarding the characters.

Abel-Rémusat was particularly fascinated by the nature of Chinese script. His deep knowledge of the diverse aspects of Chinese helped him get a rather comprehensive idea about writing as well. During his research, he refuted several times the belief of a mythological apparition of Chinese characters, conversely he stated any writing code is the fruit of civilisation processes and follows human evolution. The peculiarity of Chinese script does not prevent it from being as malleable, operational and convenient as other natural systems do. As said before, one of the strongest assumptions he made was that Chinese writing code was somehow *a posteriori* invented<sup>33</sup>, that is to say, after the spoken language took its shape. First of all, he made clear distinctions between the notions of language and word, and between those of spoken language and written language. In his work, an eye is constantly fixed on European language models, a contrastive

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<sup>33</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 123

analysis which has its *raison d'être* in a context where all scholars base their assumptions on a firm linguistic Eurocentrism. Well, Abel-Rémusat drew his conclusions on Chinese writing comparing it to European languages. He claimed that in alphabetical languages, script is nothing but an ancillary system of oral code, this reason is well confirmed by the fact that alphabets do not have any sense if disconnected from their acoustical mark, they are kind of “meaningless” graphical forms. On the contrary, in Chinese writing system, characters are basically “symboles ingénieux et pittoresques” (ingenious and picturesque symbols), able to represent by themselves the objects and the concepts they designate, without spoken language providing any assistance. The meaning structuring stems from the combination of more graphical units:

« [...] savoir lire n'est rien dans les langues ordinaires : c'est tout dans la langue chinoise [...] l'écriture chinoise n'est pas la transcription de la parole, elle est en réalité, en elle-même, un système en tout point équivalent à celui de la parole. (Abel-Rémusat, Programme du cours de la langue et de la littérature chinoises et de tartare-mandchou, 1815)» (Abel-Rémusat, 1815, p. 18-19)

[...] being able to read is nothing in ordinary languages: it is everything in Chinese language [...] Chinese writing is not the transcription of the speech, it is in reality, in itself, a system completely equivalent to the one of the speech.

The conclusions he drew about Chinese writing system are essentially two: the first one is Chinese script overcame the obstacle of word number inflation. It means that the ingenious combination processes (compound characters) made the written language an extremely convenient system as the number of written units did not increase despite the expressible ideas

were more and more complex and numerous. The second conclusion is that combination processes imply forms of classification by gender, species or analogy which are put down in writing by blending pre-existing graphical components, resulting in a sort of ‘graphical paretymology’. An example is represented by the character 怒 (*nù: wrath*), composed by the unit “slave” over the unit “heart”, another example witnessing this property may be the character 忍 (*rěn: tolerance, endurance*) made of a “knife” over the unit “heart”. This morphological process was largely debated in the years, until the concept of “ideo-phonogram” prevailed on other assumptions, being today the most accepted theory. We will come back to this issue in sections 3.3. and 6.3.

### **2.2.2 Abel-Rémusat’s notion of didactics and methodology**

Abel-Rémusat refused the idea of knowledge for knowledge’s own sake. Especially in the field of foreign languages, learning a language favours human intelligence development, widens and objectifies human vision of the world and, in case of a faraway language, it also allows to appreciate another culture. More concretely, he believed that, on one side, it was necessary to study Chinese language and Chinese writing as they both well represent Chinese cultural rationality; on the other, it was also necessary to study literary works in order to discover Chinese cultural thought. Language was an instrument to shape one’s thought, a sort of “cultural gymnastics” aimed to enrich people’s knowledge. The methodology to apply on Chinese study had first to stick to the nature and the goal of the teaching object. Firstly, he tended to distinguish between the means and the methods the missionaries had adopted in the previous centuries and the ones European literates had at his time. Secondly, he advocated for an analytical approach, which consisted in explaining students the principles of Chinese language and its script, without directly fostering the language practice. In his classes, he mainly proposed reading



and translation exercises, essays, dissertations and autonomous researches (Abel-Rémusat, “Programme du cours de langue et de littérature chinoises et tartare-mandchou”, 1815), thus building up a teaching practice much closer to literary field than linguistics. Despite Abel-Rémusat often underlined the urgency to get rid of alphabetical language influences, his lessons were held in French as he also believed students ought to possess a deep knowledge in their NL and adequate knowledge in other foreign languages to better understand phonemes. Moreover, any explanation, analogy and terminology were mostly conveyed in French. His methodology at Collège de France basically consisted in explaining rules, not in correcting error; he did not treat errors, but was more inclined to a demonstrative approach where he often refuted counter-hypothesis coming from students or other literates. His course, as appeared in the brochure of his “Programme du cours de langue et de littérature chinoises et tartare-mandchou” (1815) was divided into five sections:

1. The “spoken language” section, essentially focusing on word constitution, pronunciation, transcription methods and the analysis of dialects, a set of domains that made this section particularly relevant from a sociolinguistic perspective;
2. The “written language” section, treating the origin of characters, different styles of calligraphy and writing system patterns;
3. “Lou Chou” section (六书, *liù shū*) more focusing on the composition of Chinese characters, their elements and the way to trace them;
4. The “phraseology”<sup>34</sup> section, having students appreciate the different linguistic and literary styles: 古文 (*gǔwén*), 文昌 (*wénchāng*), 官话 (*guānhuà*);

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<sup>34</sup> Here the term “phraseology” does not have the meaning it has acquired in contemporary English speaking communities (the way in which language is used, especially in the choice of words and expressions. Cambridge online dictionary, [dictionary.cambridge.org/](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/) last consulted 01/12/2020), but is a

5. The “grammar” section, it referred to literary works and excerpts from Chinese classical on which the teacher led a grammar analysis.

The teaching materials were conceived for the same purpose of the course, they mainly comprised grammar manuals, bilingual dictionaries, essays about literary analysis and printed classical texts. No material was overtly oriented to Chinese language learning as we might imagine today, students did not have any chance to practise or listen to the language, so they ended up not developing any communicative competence. Abel-Rémusat himself did not practise Chinese in his life, not even spoke the language in his classes, so learners could not benefit from any form of language exposure during their study.

### **2.3 École des langues orientales vivantes: Bazin**

Since its foundation in 1795, the École des langues orientales vivantes was clearly different from other institution for its educational pattern. His first affiliation with the Ministry of Interior and, later on, with the Ministry of Public Education was not random: its first purpose was to teach useful language tools and communication skills to people in charge of colonial, civil or military affairs. The high valorisation of pragmatic knowledge over theoretical knowledge was the major distinctive feature between the policy adopted at the École des langues orientales from the one adopted at the Collège de France. Moreover, at the École there was a natural distinction between the so called “langues savantes ou mortes” (dead languages) and the “langues vulgaires ou vivantes” (living languages), the latter deserved priority over the former ones in teaching practice. The École, however, gained interest in Chinese language only after the First Opium War was over (1842), probably pushed by some political reasons. First among all, the long lasting antagonism France had

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direct translation from the French term “phraséologie”, which was used by Abel-Rémusat to classify one of the sections of his course track.

toward the UK, and, on the other side, the colonial ambitions France had on Chinese harbours after the first treaty was signed. It is exactly under this historical framework that the first chair of Chinese language was created at the École. Antoine Pierre Louis Bazin (1799 – 1862) had been Abel-Rémusat's student at the Collège de France. Afterwards he specialised in Yuan theatre, and became the first tenured professor of Chinese language at the École des langues orientales in 1843, although Chinese courses had already begun two years before. In the last decade of his life, he had the chance to become a point of reference for what concerned Asian languages in Western Europe, to the extent that he initiated several foreign scholars into the study of Chinese language, a remarkable case in the one of the Italian scholar Antelmo Severini, who moved to France around 1860 (See chapter 3.3). Considering the newborn geopolitical context and the pragmatic needs of his students, Bazin rejected his master's notion of “langue savante” and set out for a new way of teaching Chinese, as a “langue vulgaire”. The new relationships between Europe and China pushed him to conceive an easier and practical teaching approach, more oriented to students' needs.

### **2.3.1 Bazin's view of Chinese language and script**

As for the nature of language, Bazin classified Chinese into two main “languages”: on one side there was what he called the “langue savante” (书话, *shū huà*, literally meaning “language of books”) which represented Chinese written code referenced in his “Grammaire Mandarine” (1856). On the other side there was the “langue vulgaire” (俗话, *sú huà*), the spontaneous language really used in daily communication by Chinese people. These two definitions, one can find in Bazin's “Mémoire sur les principes généraux du chinois vulgaire” (1845) are somehow equivalent to the modern notions of classical Chinese (文言 *wén yán*) and vernacular Chinese (白话 *bái huà*). Basing most of his theories on Emperor Kangxi's

decrees, Bazin inferred the coexistence in China of different language varieties: a common, universal language (官话 *guān huà*) coexisted with two main dialectal strains: Cantonese and Fujian dialect. Bazin relied on a historical methodology to demonstrate the highly heterogeneous nature of Chinese language(s), and this once more revealed his will to focus on practical teaching needs. In other words, he tended to consider usefulness and social convenience as distinctive values of his teaching approach, prioritising *sú huà* over *shū huà*. His central hypothesis was about the clear disconnection between the two languages in daily communication practice:

«La langue savante est un idiome artificiel et de convention qui s'écrit et ne se parle pas [...] » (Bazin, 1845, p. 13)

The cultured language is an artificial and conventional language which people write but do not speak [...]

According to Bazin, the two languages are independent for two main reasons:

1. the first one is that spoken language originated prior to written Chinese. Both languages evolved over time but one evolved spontaneously as any other natural language, while the other one was built by people as a solemn civilisation mark. Written language was standardised and stopped evolving at the time of the “Five classics”, conversely the spoken language never stopped its evolution process and, according to Bazin, gained a certain degree of stability around the late Tang dynasty.
2. The second reason consists in how the two languages were used in ancient and modern China. From a social perspective, the vulgar language ensured ordinary communication in any context and about any topics; while written language was conceived for cultural and intellectual exchanges. Just because of this, several scholars were

inclined to treat Chinese written and spoken languages in a similar way to how the discrepancy between Latin and French was treated. Bazin, however, strongly refused this assimilation as he believed *shū huà* was not only a script, but also a tool for ideology and hierarchization<sup>35</sup>, features which make its existence necessary.

Once made a clear distinction between written language and spoken language, Bazin noticed a research gap about the latter. In other words, he remarked that Chinese people completely ignore their daily language: students in China only focus on *wényán*, so do scholars in Western universities. Apparently there are no scientific works systematically treating the universal spoken language in China – *guānhuà* – which is indeed essential for practical communication in diplomacy and business affairs. For this reason, since the moment he gained his chair, Bazin never stopped examining the functioning of *guānhuà*, and in the attempt of simplifying the nature of the language, he tried to elaborate a grammar which “par une méthode simple et une exposition claire des principes, facilite l’étude du chinois vulgaire” (Bazin, 1845, p. 4). When drafting his grammar, Bazin had to face an old controversy about Chinese “monosyllabism” and “polysyllabism”. He first adopted Abel-Rémusat’s view, in fact he did not believe in a polysyllabic essence of the language, he thought that if Chinese was observed from a phonetic perspective, it would be mostly composed by polysyllabic or disyllabic constituents. On the basis of this position, Bazin identified two approaches to the notions of “word”: one resulting from written language, the other resulting from spoken language. Bazin changed his opinion several times along his research, coming to the conclusion that any “distinct sound” becomes meaningful if associated to a character or to other sounds; which means, monosyllabism acquires sense if related to the script. To clarify his

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<sup>35</sup> Bazin, 1845, p.12-13

ambiguous definition in his grammar, he later borrowed two Chinese terms to identify the dualistic notion of “word”: 字 (*zì*) was the word resulting from the written language, and 言 (*yán*) was the one resulting from the spoken language. Different roles played by characters in written language and spoken language originated the theories of absolute and relative monosyllabism: Bazin explained that a compound word in spoken language is a word formed by the aggregation of more monosyllables, a sort of word written through several characters. As Chinese has no alphabet and is solely read in the form of characters, identifying a word or a locution will never be as simple and evident as one can do in alphabetical languages. After all, the fact of being monosyllabic or polysyllabic is not a real problem, according to Bazin, but a mere “academic issue”.

As for pronunciation, Bazin distinguished two categories of problems, those related to phonetics and phonology, and those related to pedagogy, a branch he always paid particular attention to. Soon after he first analysed the main components of Chinese phonetics as consonants (音 *yīn*), vowels (韵 *yùn*) and tones and intonation (声 *shēng*), Bazin proved that lots of sounds were also findable in Western languages. One of the most striking features of Chinese language is, indeed, intonation which intervenes in the language by multiplying the number of words proportionally to the one of ideas; Chinese intonation differs in fact from the natural intonation of other languages as it is intimately related to the language. An important section in his “Mémoire” is dedicated to some reflections on the connections between sounds and characters. The first one involves an imitative process in which meaning associations occur in presence of certain homonym or paronym monosyllables. It is the case, for instance, of sounds like *king* and *keng* whose characters are often related to violence, and sounds like *run*, *ruan* and *nen*<sup>36</sup> frequently related to

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<sup>36</sup> These phonetic transcriptions were used at Bazin’s time.

sweetness and tenderness. Bazin inferred that if an idea was arbitrarily associated to a certain sound, then Chinese people tended to reproduce that phoneme so as to underline some semantic similarity or etymological relationship. Bazin's theories moved further, if this imitative process somehow represents one of the main principles of Chinese lexicon formation, well it is possible to classify words by sound and conceptual association. Amongst the several categories Bazin identified, he particularly focused on two language phenomena which Abel-Rémusat had already mentioned in his work. The first concerns the Chinese words composed by a couple of synonyms, where the second character does not add any information to the first. In these aggregated words, he believed, there was always a dominant monosyllable expressing the main concept and a second monosyllable added just for euphonic reasons; it is the case of 温和 (*wēnhé*, warm), 和平 (*héping*, peace), 喜悦 (*xǐyuè*, delightful), 欢喜 (*huānxǐ*, joyful). The second phenomenon, much easier for his learning audience to grasp, concerns those words composed by couples of antonyms. The fact of matching opposed concepts is *per se* enough to create a meaningful picture in Chinese speakers' mind; it is the case of terms as 买卖 (*mǎimài*, transaction), 问答 (*wèndá*, ask and answer), 大小 (*dàxiǎo*, size), 好坏 (*hǎohuài*, stand or fall).

As for Chinese script, Bazin broke with the cliché that Chinese writing system stems from an ideographic nature. From a practical perspective of Chinese language teaching, he proposed to rethink Chinese script as an ideo-phonographic system. Bazin called in question the prominent role assigned to radicals (*clés* in French, 部首 *bùshǒu* in Chinese) by the first sinologists; he firmly believed that the most meaningful constituent had to be found in phonetic elements, not in sinographic<sup>37</sup> components. In fact, he continued, in real life situations being able to

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<sup>37</sup> Sinograph or sinora, a neologism borrowed from "Méthode programmée du chinois moderne" by D. Weulersse and N. Lyssenko

decode a radical is far from really understanding what the character stands for, the elements designated as radicals do not always lead to the sense. Conversely, it is rather frequent to see phonetic elements giving more semantic information than what a radical can do; for this reason Bazin thought the name “radical” and “clé” (key) are paradoxical and inappropriate in linguistics as they do not forcibly refer to the semantic root. Moreover, Bazin drew two related considerations: the first is that all phonetic units are themselves independent characters used in the language; the second is that nearly all radical can be employed as phonetic units. Considering a broader investigation range, Bazin underlined the important proportion of ideo-phonographic characters on the overall number of characters, such phenomenon cannot be undervalued as it highlights the particular role played by the sound in the recognition of meaning, a intimate connection between written code and oral code. Bazin tried to demonstrate the independence of phonetic units in Chinese writing system in a similar way to how alphabetic syllables work, but he failed as he never managed to demonstrate his theory, nor was able to classify the phonetic units or find concrete evidence. He eventually ended up claiming that Chinese script is «idéo-phonographique pour les lettrés [mais] tend naturellement à devenir phonographique pour le peuple» (Bazin, 1845, p. 29), this dualism is not inherent in the nature of the language but resides in the sinographic ignorance of most people.

### **2.3.2 Bazin’s notion of didactics and methodology**

From the first paragraphs of his “Mémoire”, Bazin underlined his will to push teaching and learning to a practical direction, complying with the policy of his institution. According to him, Chinese language teaching shows a double interest for human mind: on one side it satisfies the natural curiosity in another civilisation, on the other it enables the mastery of a



different language. The approaches and the teaching tools, thus, must be chosen on the basis of these two intellectual orientations.

Although the policy carried out at the *École des langues orientales* promoted a pragmatic approach to language teaching, especially functional to politicians, merchants and missionaries, Bazin's courses were essentially theoretical and mostly held in French language<sup>38</sup>. He had not had any chance to practise Chinese in mainland China, he knew the language only through the scientific and literary works he had read, he merely got in touch with sinological universe from paper. This fact directly affected Bazin's teaching methodology, which could not overcome the traditional paradigm consisting of grammar explanations and translation of classical texts. At this evolution step of Chinese teaching in French academies, it appears quite evident that Chinese as a foreign language can be learned and taught via two possible approaches: the first includes the knowledge on the language, the second includes the mastery of the language. In theory, the *Ecole's* policy was committed to rely on the second approach, in other words, students should have acquired the effective use of the language functioning (formulas, vocabulary, locutions, sayings), but Bazin was not able to establish such a clear relationship between his mother tongue and the target language of his lessons. He just conducted students to gain a reflexive and metalinguistic view of the language, leaving them the burden to carry on language practice. This load was even heavier if we think that learners could not benefit from the support of any structured teaching material. In particular, all texts and authentic documents written in Chinese for students' use were kept in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, but the most striking point is that the majority of them was handwritten, which implied a deep mastery of Chinese calligraphy, an ability rarely mastered by Western sinologists either. Despite their difficult consultation, these manuscripts

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<sup>38</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 175

and spare documents probably represented the only way to get students closer to Chinese authentic writing, as professors seldom wrote Chinese characters in class. Bazin in several occasions justified this lack of materials by clarifying the focus of his course: the priority had to be given to spoken Chinese. In his *Rapport sur un Manuel pratique de la langue chinoise vulgaire*, published in “*Journal Asiatique*” (1846), Bazin explained clearly that Chinese learning had to be considered as a foreign language learning, and not as an archaeological research where the language stood more for a relic rather than a live matter. To break away from the past, Bazin based his course onto some methodological principles:

1. The first pillar consists in the definition of which Chinese had to be the object of teaching and learning. He took the *guanhua*, based on Beijing and Nanjing dialects, as Chinese national language. Its pronunciation was the standard pronunciation of characters.
2. The second principle is about the learning methodology, which had to differ from the one of *guwen*. If the latter implies rigorous research on the original sources, *guanhua* should be learnt by means of simple grammatical syntheses, translated texts with glossaries and ordinary dialogues. Bazin, for instance, recommended as learning tools the Chinese dictionaries by Medhurst and Morrison, manuals by Wells-Williams and Rochet and by Gonçalves, such as “*Arte China*” (1829)<sup>39</sup>.
3. The third one concerns the language abilities Bazin decided to focus on in his course: he thought that any didactic effort had to concentrate more on writing than on pronunciation, as students found it harder to write and understand Chinese script than speaking.

Finally, in respect of this new concept of Chinese teaching and learning, it should be noted that the reorientation Bazin introduced in French sinology

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<sup>39</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 183

has been necessary both to broaden research horizons, and to face the competitiveness of British sinology which had been growing fast and proved to be able to get more immediate outcomes thanks to a very practical approach. A practical approach that the Ecole tried to implement soon after Bazin's death by hiring some "professor-interpreters", like Klekowski, figures with a consistent diplomatic background experience in China, supposed to adapt the teaching approach to the "professional" needs. Bazin, in conclusion, deserved the merit of being the first French sinologist to conceive Chinese as a foreign living language to teach and learn.

## **2.4 Université de Lyon: Courant**

Throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, Paris held the monopoly of the whole French sinology, hosting two prestigious higher institutions with a chair of Chinese language each. But at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese studies began spreading over the suburban areas. Thanks to the financial support of Paul Doumer - General Governor of Indochina - and thanks to the input of the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon, a curriculum in Chinese studies was instituted in 1903 at the Université de Lyon, laying foundations for the first university chair of Chinese language and civilisation out of the capital city, established in 1913. The historical reasons behind this can be first found in the process of forced westernisation China had been undergoing by that time. From the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) to the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), China saw its immortal prestige progressively decline to the status of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country (半殖民半封建, *bàn zhímín bàn fēngjiàn*). This new awareness affecting in particular Chinese élite, to some extent reshaped the role of Chinese civilisation inside and outside the country, modelling the relationships between China and the rest of the world. At the same time, learning its language(s) and its culture(s) became a profitable tool for colonists, at the cost of colonised people. As for French side, after

the establishment of the Third Republic, Government encouraged a more active colonial policy to face the rising competitiveness of other colonial powers, first among all the United Kingdom. Since the Far East had begun to gain a prominent place in global exchanges, the UK had clear designs over the whole area, nearly monopolising the trade with China. However, in 1897, Paul Doumer took the post of General Governor of Indochina (1897-1902) and secured a place to France in the commercial expansion to China. From 1897, he started huge infrastructural and administrative works to set out the reorganisation of Indochinese area. The major project Doumer had to work on around those years was the construction of a railway line in Yunnan province, for which he had just received a loan of 200 million francs. In view of the humongous effort to achieve the project, Doumer started a correspondence with the Chamber of Commerce of Lyon, where he underlined the urgency of a “colonial education”<sup>40</sup> in Asian languages and the necessity to train specialised personnel for French expansion in Asia. The colonialist ideology spread among the upper class and found a fertile ground in Lyon academic world, where, due to the decision of July 15<sup>th</sup> 1875, a big variety of chairs in “colonial disciplines” got institutionalised. To conclude, under the impulse of Doumer and the pressure of colonial interests, in 1896 the University of Lyon became a university nearly “independent” from the capital; in September 1900 Chinese language made its first apparition as an elective subject in the Bachelor of humanities, philosophy, history and living languages. The first complete curriculum in Chinese studies was then established in 1902, while the first chair was given to Courant in 1913 soon after he qualified from the Ministry of Public Education and Beaux-Arts.

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<sup>40</sup> Singaravélou P., « L’enseignement supérieur colonial. Un état de lieux. », *Histoire de l’éducation*, n ° 122, 2009, p. 71-92

### 2.4.1 Courant's view of Chinese language and script

Courant, after graduating in Chinese and Japanese from the *École des langues orientales*, was recognised for his works on Korea and Japan, less known in France for his contribution to Chinese area study. In his most relevant works concerning Chinese language “*De la lecture japonaise des textes contenant uniquement ou principalement des caractères idéographiques*” (1897), “*L’enseignement du chinois à Lyon*” (1901), “*La langue chinoise parlée: grammaire du Kwan Hwa septentrional*” (1913) it appears that Courant's courses were designed halfway between the language and the culture. His approach fell within the pragmatic mission of the University of Lyon, which mainly pursued colonial purposes, it designed its courses to confer students an overview of Chinese civilisation and society and tended to teach them practical notions for life in China.

Adopting the perspective of his precursors Abel-Rémusat and Bazin, Courant did not consider Chinese language as a united and homogeneous language code, on the contrary he claimed the pluralistic nature of the language: «la langue chinoise n'est pas une seule» (Chinese language is not only one), he announced in the introduction of his grammar. Analysing the different development lines, the different uses and styles, Courant distinguished between the “written language” and the “spoken language” (or more precisely “modern language”)<sup>41</sup>. On one side the written language had literary overtones, tended to reproduce the ancestors and was “destined to the eyes, very rarely comprehensible to the ears”; on the other spoken language was an ordinary code, based on the Northern Chinese, the Mandarin, and spoken by the majority of the population. In his grammar and his courses in Lyon, Courant paid special attention to “modern Chinese” spoken and written by Mandarins, neglecting the literary written language. In his mind the two languages, despite being different in syntax, shared a

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<sup>41</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 217

common lexical base which diluted the distinction between them. It is interesting to remark how often Courant associated the language nature with the peculiarity of its writing system, considering character as the backbone of whole Chinese. In his grammar he described words as always monosyllabic, invariable and isolated, conferring the language a monosyllabic and isolating structure, as well. The relationship between the speech, the language and the writing was probably the core of Courant's research: he believed that two systems of signs – visual and auditory - coexisted in the language, creating thus “two languages” connected and independent at the same time. The first system matches the ideas with the sounds, as any other language; the second consists in expressing the ideas through the writing, which is the main point of divergence from alphabetic languages. According to Courant's thought, Chinese script is in fact a significant system, having its own independence: the evidence is given by the fact one can understand a meaning and get its coherence without mastering the pronunciation, which may vary from a language code to another (dialectophone areas). This independence of the two systems and the visual component of the characters are not seen by Courant as an obstacle to learning but as a sort of tool to facilitate visual memory.

#### **2.4.2 Courant's notion of didactics and methodology**

According to official registers, Courant's audience in class was extremely diversified, comprising students from the School of Trade, accountants, clerks, students from the Bachelor of Humanities, secondary school teachers, retired officers and foreign students. This undoubtedly introduced an important change in Chinese language learning status: it progressively turned from a specialist discipline to an ordinary subject. However, Courant's approach was not very distant from the one adopted in the capital: his lesson primarily relied on grammar exposition and text explanation, and they were often followed by practice-oriented sessions

where students were led to understand and produce “usual sentences”. The activities he proposed included oral practice, explication of dialogues, essays and written versions (“L’enseignement du chinois a Lyon”, 1901), which did not actually deviate so much from the traditional methodology based on grammar and translation. Courant, however, conceived this method in a very precise way, from the beginning of his chair, he started reflecting on a progressive and ordered teaching-learning approach. The material supports for students’ use at the time –grammar and manual- were not completely satisfactory, they were often judged vague, unclear and not progressive for a natural learning cycle<sup>42</sup>. As a remedy, Courant planned a more rational grammar which should have taken into account both the practical side of the language and the grammatical progression. His “La langue chinoise parlée: grammaire du Kwan Hwa septentrional” was so finally published in 1913. Unfortunately, Courant as his precursors in the capital, were somehow forced to produce their own teaching materials – elaborate grammar principles, select versions and topics to work on, draft vocabulary elements- and distribute them in classroom. So, in the case of Chinese teaching, the materials broadly used included dictionaries, collection of dialogues bought by the Chamber of Commerce, as well as documents acquired by university library.

## **2.5 CFL in secondary education**

As stated before, Chinese language was a discipline exclusively taught at university level until the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it started spreading in secondary education only after the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, precisely in 1954. This top-down propagation witnessed a turning point in CFL evolution trend in France as its status changed from that of a “discipline for specialists” to that of an “ordinary school subject”.

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<sup>42</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 222

In its new shape, the reorganisation of CFL secondary school system had to face some pedagogical challenges and fulfil educational needs: what aspects of Chinese language should become common knowledge? Which goals should be expected at the end of any study cycle? How should typical learning time adapt to acquisition pace of Chinese language? This bunch of reflections firstly emerged from secondary education environment, then extended to a more general approach to Chinese teaching, and finally led to the birth of modern CFL didactics in France. The character-based theory (字本位 *zìběnwèi*), largely discussed in mainland China and supported by a stream of Chinese linguists like the “hanzi-ologist”<sup>43</sup> Xu Tongqiang, made its apparition in France in the late 80s. This theory contributed to outline the pedagogical foundation of an innovative approach actively promoted by Joel Bellassen that, later, led to what his student Bernard Allanic named the “French school” of CFL teaching. Despite the great diffusion of the character-based theory in France, it should be noted that this approach has successfully permeated the secondary education system to the point of becoming part of the national programme, mainly because of the position of General Inspector of Chinese Language teaching Bellassen covered from 2006. The debate around its efficiency and theoretical base is still open and affects its diffusion in universities, where in fact the character-based approach has not gained the same success as in secondary schools. In addition to this fast evolution of Chinese language status in France, there is another important difference to highlight between CFL as a university discipline and as school subject, which basically consists in the compulsory form CFL took once introduced in secondary education. In fact, Chinese did not penetrate French education as a spontaneous and gradual phenomenon, but resulted from a central policy aimed at guiding foreign language teaching at national level. As the economist François Grin<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> T. Pellin, 2014

<sup>44</sup> Grin, 2005, p. 34



underlined, before the introduction of a foreign language in a national programme can be justified and legitimated, it is essential to qualify the language in terms of “(de) nécessité et d’efficience externe en économie de l’éducation”, but also reconsider its role as geopolitical, historical and cultural “stratégies volontaristes”. According to these principles, considering the increasing social and economic role China was acting in Far East and its influences in the West throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, CFL had the perfect profile to be included and welcomed among the foreign languages of new national programmes.

The foreign languages, or living language (LVE, langues vivantes) as the French system used to define them, have been taught in public education since 1795 (loi du 3 brumaire, IV year); from elective subjects they gradually became compulsory subjects to all French students after 1829. The full legitimacy was finally decreed by the Statute of March 5<sup>th</sup> 1847 which imposed all students from professional schools to take up at least a compulsory foreign language, the following year the requirement was extended to all high schools and middle schools of France (arrêté of October 11<sup>th</sup> 1848). However, the regulations on foreign language teaching vary from country to country, Europe itself shows huge discrepancy in language teaching policy and methodology among its members. Some countries have made a distinction between compulsory languages and elective languages, other countries prioritise certain languages over others; finally there are also countries which let students free to choose any language they desire to study. Eurydice and Eurostat reports (2012) show how English is still on the top of all foreign languages studied in Europe, it comes out that it is a mandatory language in public and private education in 14 countries. Comparing this tendency with French national policy, we can observe France has favoured a plurilingual education, enhanced language diversity in curricula and guaranteed free choice to students, especially

complying with the project of “Plurilingual and Intercultural Education” carried out by the Council of Europe. This liberal language policy based on diversity and continuity permeates the whole education system, from primary school to Baccalauréat, and offers a wide variety of possible choices: 8 languages at primary school (English, German, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Portuguese)<sup>45</sup>, 33 languages at middle and high school<sup>46</sup>, as well as 56 foreign and regional languages tested at general and technological Baccalauréat<sup>47</sup>.

Regarding Chinese language, it results an eligible subject in only 6 European countries out of 32, this figure indicates a still insufficient promotion and a poor enhancement of a real language diversity, contrary to what was pursued by the Council of Europe and the European Union. In France, the propagation of Chinese language in public education has gone through several phases, spurred by national and geopolitical pressures. We can observe that the first phase dates back to the late 50s, when the lycée Montgeron in Paris opened the «première implantation d’un enseignement de chinois dans un établissement secondaire occidental»<sup>48</sup>. Few years later another milestone was set in CFL institutionalisation process: the creation of the first CAPES in Chinese language in 1966, interrupted between 1968 and 1973, and regularly carried out again from 1974. Soon after, in 1977, Robert Ruhlmann got in charge of IGEN<sup>49</sup> mission for Chinese language and started to rationalise CFL contents and its teaching framework<sup>50</sup>. The essential aspects of CFL programmes were then published in 1979 for middle school and in 1981 for high school. More progress in CFL institutionalisation was made some years later, when the Association of

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<sup>45</sup> Programmes de langues étrangères pour l’école primaire, 2007

<sup>46</sup> Eurydice and Erustat reports, 2012

<sup>47</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 279

<sup>48</sup> Bellassen, 2010-11, p. 4

<sup>49</sup> Inspection Générale de l’Education Nationale

<sup>50</sup> Zhang, 2016, p. 286

French Teachers of Chinese Language (AFPC<sup>51</sup>) was founded in 1984: the board was initially chaired by Noël Dutrait, then, from 1987 to 2006, by Joël Bellassen. In 1985 the Board appointed the first research team investigating CFL school teaching on behalf of INRP<sup>52</sup>. The group was actually in charge of pursuing a systematic work on CFL disciplinary contents and pedagogical methodology in secondary school environments. The joint efforts resulted in the creation of the Minimum Threshold of Chinese Characters - SMIC<sup>53</sup> (French acronym), conceived and elaborated by J. Bellassen and F. Audry-Iljic<sup>54</sup> in 1985, within the framework of the National Institute of Pedagogical Research<sup>55</sup> (see Table 3). Soon after that, SMIC was taken as a reference tool for teaching planning and pedagogical practice by AFPC, which defined it as «[Un] ensemble de 400 caractères chinois [qui] est l'objectif pédagogique à atteindre en matière de connaissance de caractères dans l'enseignement secondaire de Chinois Langue vivante 2 (LV2) et Langue vivante 3 (LV3)». <sup>56</sup> Since its first release, the threshold got revised several times and adapted to the diverse learning needs and programmes, the latest update includes four variants: the SMIC containing the essential 400 characters, the threshold for LV3 containing 405 characters, the one for LV2 containing 505 characters and the one for LV1 (specialised tracks) containing 805 characters<sup>57</sup>. The publication of SMIC brought some new elements in national programmes for middle school (in 1985) and for lycée (in 1988), especially after the new charge of M. Coyaud, Ruhlmann's successor at the head of IGEN. The first textbook methodologically based on SMIC concept was indeed "Méthode d'initiation à la langue et à l'écriture chinoises". Published in

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<sup>51</sup> Association Française des Professeurs de chinois

<sup>52</sup> Institut Nationale de Recherche Pédagogique

<sup>53</sup> Seuil Minimum de Caractères Chinois

<sup>54</sup> Françoise Audry-Iljic was the 2<sup>nd</sup> general inspector for Chinese language in France, taking over J. Bellassen's office.

<sup>55</sup> Institut National de la Recherche Pédagogique

<sup>56</sup> Source : <http://www.hanzidico.com/caracteres/seuil-minimum-indispensable-de-caracteres-chinois/> (20/08/2020)

<sup>57</sup> Source : <https://www.afpc.asso.fr/Caracteres> (21/08/2020)

1989 by J. Bellassen and P. Zhang, this manual represented a real epistemological break with all the previous textbooks conceived for Chinese learners ever since, its unprecedented pedagogical approach based on characters and not on grammar progression (approach broadly used for European languages) or word lists (Chinese mainland approach) opened the way for the French school of Chinese language teaching, as emerges from the publication of the “Livre blanc sur l’enseignement du chinois dans le Secondaire en France” (1986). As previously mentioned, despite the innovative wave Bellassen’s approach has brought in French CFL teaching community, the fact is that very few academic realities decided to adopt it, as opposed to what happened in secondary schools. Among these, INALCO has probably been the institution which mostly attempted to convert the character-based approach into real teaching practice, its research group<sup>58</sup> coordinated by Bellassen continued to publish related materials as well as integrating and updating the SMIC over the years, up to the point of releasing the variants mentioned above.

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<sup>58</sup> The original research group is today incorporated in and identified with the équipe PLIDAM (Pluralité des Langues et des Identités: Didactique, Acquisition et Médiation), at INALCO.

Table 3

*Seuil Minimum de Caractères Chinois*

啊	爱	安	八	把	爸	吧	白	百	班	半	办	帮	包	饱	报	杯	北	被	本
比	笔	边	变	表	别	病	不	部	步	才	菜	茶	差	长	常	场	车	成	城
吃	出	穿	春	次	从	错	打	大	带	但	刀	到	道	的	得	等	底	地	第
点	电	店	定	冬	东	懂	动	都	对	多	饿	儿	二	发	法	饭	方	房	放
非	飞	分	份	风	封	服	父	该	干	感	刚	高	个	给	跟	工	公	共	关
馆	贵	国	果	过	还	孩	海	汉	好	号	喝	河	和	黑	很	红	后	候	花
画	话	坏	欢	黄	回	会	活	火	或	机	极	几	己	记	家	加	间	见	件
江	讲	叫	教	接	今	斤	近	进	京	经	九	酒	久	就	旧	觉	开	看	可
渴	课	刻	口	快	筷	块	来	老	了	冷	离	里	力	立	连	两	辆	〇	六
楼	路	妈	马	吗	买	卖	慢	忙	毛	么	没	每	门	们	米	面	名	明	票
母	木	拿	哪	那	男	南	难	呢	能	你	年	念	您	农	女	旁	跑	朋	票
七	期	骑	起	气	汽	千	前	钱	亲	请	情	秋	取	去	然	让	热	人	认
日	肉	如	三	色	山	商	上	少	谁	身	什	生	声	师	十	石	时	识	始
是	事	视	市	收	手	书	树	双	水	睡	说	思	死	四	送	算	虽	岁	所
他	她	它	太	特	提	题	体	天	田	条	听	同	头	图	土	外	完	玩	晚
万	王	往	为	位	文	问	我	五	午	物	西	息	刁	洗	喜	系	夏	下	先
现	想	向	小	笑	校	些	鞋	写	谢	新	心	信	星	行	姓	兴	休	学	言
阳	样	要	药	也	夜	一	医	衣	已	以	意	因	音	应	影	用	有	友	又
鱼	语	雨	远	院	月	越	在	再	咱	早	怎	站	张	找	者	这	着	真	正
知	只	纸	中	钟	种	重	主	住	助	桌	子	字	自	走	最	昨	作	做	坐

Source: A.F.P.C.

Getting benefit from the advancements of the 80s, CFL finally took its flight in the 2000s. In 1998 a learner out of five took up Chinese as LV2 (Second foreign language) and, by the end of that decade, Chinese language courses were provided in 13 secondary institutions out of 28. Since then, the number of candidates taking mandatory Chinese exam at Baccalauréat has increased year by year and, in turn, the number of specialised teachers increased too, until the first selection process for national teaching qualification in secondary education<sup>59</sup> was finally held in 1999. This decade was also marked by a proliferation of scientific events (forums, training sessions and symposiums) aimed to promote more specific methods and tools for CFL teaching. The first remarkable training

<sup>59</sup> Concours d'agrégation

day organised by AFPC on CFL pedagogy took place in February 1996 and concentrated on what has turned out to be a focal point in French School of Chinese language until today: “Oral Chinese teaching and the relationship between written and oral didactics in CFL”. Echoing the propagation and institutionalisation of Chinese language in secondary learning environments, CFL teaching gained a full recognition as a scientific discipline in academic context as well, especially after Joël Bellassen qualified in didactics. In fact, he obtained his HDR at the University Paris VII in 1997 presenting a mémoire<sup>60</sup> entitled “Eléments de didactique du chinois, éléments d’une didactique des langues à écriture non alphabétique”, being the first HDR in the country connected to a Chinese teaching-related domain. This starting point actually paved the way for dozens of related university bachelors and masters, as well as several PhD thesis investigating Chinese teaching and learning dimensions.

The latest chapter of CFL story in France began after the second “Plan de rénovation de l’enseignement des langues vivantes étrangère” was launched by Education Ministry in 2005. This policy restored and reviewed the role of foreign languages in French education, in particular it broadened the range of eligible languages and stressed their importance in any school curricula. As a consequence, the number of Chinese learners increased by over 400% in little more than a decade and exceeded the number of Arabic and Russian learners<sup>61</sup>. Chinese thus became the fifth most studied language in France, after English, German, Spanish and Italian. Its quantitative and qualitative evolution, together with the intentions of the second ministerial plan, favoured a better integration of Chinese language into the policy of the other foreign languages. In fact, since 2009 according to the principle of early language learning, Chinese courses were largely introduced in primary schools both as afternoon classes and mandatory

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<sup>60</sup> mémoire d’habilitation (habilitation thesis, in English)

<sup>61</sup> Bellassen, 2015, p. 5

classes. As for contents and teaching objectives, CFL finally reached a standard for all levels and cycles in 2002, in partial synergy with CEFR indicators. Probably, the last advancement in CFL institutionalisation and disciplinisation in France occurred in 2013, when the Conseil supérieur des programmes, a public organism in charge of programming syllabi and content tables, approved the so called “charte des programmes”<sup>62</sup> aimed to bring any taught programme under the principle of “global coherence”. The legislator stressed the importance of laying a “socle commun de connaissances, de compétences et de culture ” throughout all study cycles and covering all curricular disciplines. Chinese language could no longer be considered an isolated self-referential subject, but needs more than ever before to successfully integrate into the general framework of second language teaching, with regard to methodological approaches, teaching practice, learning and educational goals.

CFL programmes in France have gone through a progressive redefinition process since the end of the 70s. The first CFL programme for middle school was approved in 1985, even though its release occurred three years earlier than SMIC was officially published, the central role of characters in Chinese language pedagogy (字本位 *zìběnwèi*) seemed already very clear. As first learning goal, pupils were expected to actively master 400 characters by the end of middle school, teachers could exclusively teach a univocal form of Chinese, the *guoyu* or the *putonghua*, excluding once for all language varieties (Cantonese) and *wenyan* from any school programme. Characters were taught and acquired in their simplified form but students could consult at any time the traditional forms, which were listed beside simplified characters for morphological and cultural reference. The only admitted guide for pronunciation was *Pinyin*. Several

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<sup>62</sup> Loi d’orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l’Ecole de la République (2013, June 8th)

characters to actively master<sup>63</sup> had been inserted in the list for a pragmatic purpose, enable students to read and understand newspapers and posters dealing with Chinese society and politics; it follows that lots of these characters were often laden with emphatic and socio-political connotations students did not always perceive, like: 理 (lǐ: doctrine), 略 (lüè: strategy, invasion), 革 (gé: revolution), 结 (jié: union). The adjustment and redefinition of Chinese programmes took place after 2002, in accordance with the intention of a policy of real “plurilinguisme” and with new CEFR level indicators. Since then, Chinese started to be considered in terms of competence, the emphasis was shifted onto real life situations and pragmatic communication, which better met the needs of modern foreign language teaching and learning:

«La langue chinoise a été considérée depuis longtemps comme figure d’altérité linguistique et culturelle. Elle est de plus aujourd’hui reconnue comme ce qu’elle est, en raison de la mondialisation effective [...]. Son usage, et donc sa valeur d’insertion professionnelle comme langue de travail, scientifique et commerciale, vont croissant, tandis qu’elle s’affirme, avec l’anglais, comme langue majeure sur Internet» (Programme di chinois, 2002).

With regard to methodology, SMIC seemed to integrate with a second but not less important approach “字带词<sup>64</sup>” (zì dài cí: lit. characters bring words), which consisted in the idea that the selection of characters in large part guides the selection of words in textbooks and programmes. The lexical approach adopted for CFL between 2002 and 2008 differed from that adopted in Western language pedagogy, which mainly consisted in the progressive introduction of new vocabulary according to communicative

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<sup>63</sup> Translated from the French expression “caractères à savoir de façon active”, or more commonly called “caractères actifs”

<sup>64</sup> J. Bellassen, 1996



needs, no matter the relation to one or more semantic spheres. Chinese character teaching has traditionally relied on a more rational and, to a certain extent, “sophisticated” approach. Among these, one of the most influential and innovative approach is the one proposed by Monique Hoa in the early 2000s. It consists in a sort of “chrono-pedagogy of characters use”, according to which it is recommended to differentiate the teaching-learning pace between oral and written progression (see section 6.3). This approach, very distant from the teaching approaches commonly adopted for European languages, emerges quite clearly in the series of Hoa’s language textbooks “C’est du Chinois!”, still highly consulted in France and taken as a solid reference tool for CFL. Hoa’s concept suggests that spoken Chinese and written Chinese are indeed integrated components of the same language system, with different intrinsic features which require equally different acquisition paces and teaching methods. This assumption sparked the idea of teaching Chinese by disjoining spoken language from written language, meanwhile it spurred the creation of textbooks designed accordingly, like “Le Chinois....comme en Chine” (Allanic, 2008). Despite its innovative portent, it should be made clear that “Le Chinois...comme en Chine” does not enjoy a wide diffusion in France. In recent times, in fact, a certain prominence is given to communication and action-oriented approach, probably in response to a contamination of methodological models borrowed from European SL teaching. A widely adopted textbook in secondary education which definitely points in this direction is Arslangul’s series “Ni shuo ne” (2009) and “Ni shuo ba” (2013), designed according to CEFR levels of competence and focusing on textuality and the dialogic functioning of communicative exchange.

## **CHAPTER 3. CFL history in Italy**

### **3.1 Institutional framework**

Someone may believe that the interest in Chinese language and culture is none other than a bizarre, new phenomenon brought in Italy by waves of migration and globalisation process. However, a closer inspection may reveal it is not merely so. The constant number of students that every year sign up for Chinese courses in universities and in private institutes clearly signals how important it is for many Italians to get in touch and understand such a faraway cultural and linguistic dimension. Although quantitative analysis on Chinese learners in Italy mostly refer to the last three or four decades, the task of teaching Chinese to students of different times is not completely new in our country. In fact, it finds its origins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, where historical events deeply impacted on the theories and the practice of education. There were several geo-political events which affected the development of European sinology in 19<sup>th</sup> century. First of all, the economic and commercial interests that pushed Great Britain to explore China shed light on some aspects of the Celestial Empire left in the shade by previous catholic and Jesuit missions. That was the time when, on one side, some pioneering works in English describing and despising Chinese customs started to be published and circulate across Europe; on the other, the emerging French school of sinology began to investigate on Chinese culture and literature and to explore the first approaches to Chinese language teaching. Under the breeze brought by British and French researchers at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fair number of Italian scholars approached China and its related studies too. But, to do so, their only chance was to cross the Alps and enrol in one of the three French academies having activated a pioneering Chinese language curriculum. The institution which most of all attracted Italian scholars was surely the Collège de France, in Paris, where the first chair in “Langue et littérature chinoises

et tartares-mandchoues” was settled in 1814 and assigned to Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat. Although many intellectuals and passionate students devoted themselves to Chinese for many years, almost none of them had the opportunity to move to China for a while to practice what had been learnt on French soil. For this reason, the teaching methodology was fairly distant from pragmatism, lesson practice was exclusively focused on grammar explanations and translation of literary works; the only chance to hear a little spoken Chinese was, some years later and in some limited cases, through the voice of mother tongue lecturers (*répétiteurs*), personnel often with no background experience hired in mainland China. In Italy, the first professors able to utter some words in Chinese, or even deliver a whole speech, started to lecture at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century probably in the Collegio de’ cinesi .

Chinese language teaching stopped for a long time because of political issues overwhelming our country: firstly the unification of Italy in 1861, secondly the rise of fascist dictatorship and the II World War along 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite socio-political turbulence had a strong and, at times, disruptive impact on the whole academic world and, as a consequence, on the evolution of teaching research in all disciplinary fields, Italian sinology found the way to progress anyway, both in theory and practice. This was not only due to second language teaching policies, but also to Chinese teachers who started to spend a study abroad experience and were finally able to refine a particular teaching methodology, closer to Chinese learners’ needs. The modern distinction of academic research into smaller and smaller study areas was perhaps one of the key-factors that distinguished modern Chinese teachers from their 19<sup>th</sup> century’s counterparts. Until this revolutionary concept, those who by any chance used to face and treat issues connected to the East were generally defined “Orientalists”, and were often researchers or scholars supposed to master several Asian

languages very distant from one another. Therefore, their degree of analytical competence on one single language or culture was frequently diluted by the breadth of their knowledge horizon. Conversely, in the era of area studies, researchers have been asked to focus on a single stream of a discipline and analyse its aspects or push forward its innovation. CFL followed the same path, in fact, since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more and more specialised teachers appeared in Italian university and in educational environments, contributing to make substantial advances in sinological research on one side, and to optimise Chinese language didactics for Italian students, on the other.

### **3.2 University of Pavia and University of Pisa**

According to national registers<sup>65</sup>, the University of Pavia was the first Italian university openly consecrated to orientalism. Indeed, it activated a course of Chinese language already in 1806, charging Joseph Hager (1757-1819) as official lecturer. Hager was a German-Italian scholar that, after completing his higher education in Vienna, Rome and Paris<sup>66</sup>, started his academic career in the field of Arabic studies. Soon after he moved to Palermo in 1794 and proved his skills in Arabic language by denying a wrong translation of a manuscript done by the abbot Giuseppe Vella. Hager was also a scholar of Chinese language and culture, so he tried unsuccessfully to make himself known in the higher echelons of Oxford University. More than for academic achievements, Hager became quite popular in upcoming decades for his dispute with Antonio Montucci, another Italian scholar who devoted a lot of time projecting a Chinese language dictionary originally funded by the king of Prussia. Hager drew Montucci's wrath because he published a table of a similar dictionary in "Magasin encyclopédique" where he publicly made inconsiderate

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<sup>65</sup> Bertuccioli & Masini, 1996

<sup>66</sup> Campana, 2001

comments on Chinese language learning, one of the most remarkable claims is that Chinese is indeed an easy language to take up, as long as learners can use a quality dictionary. The official statement of publication of his dictionary project reported:

« M. le Docteur Hager va publier à Londres un Dictionnaire, déjà prêt pour l'impression, qui a été composé en Chine, comparé avec les meilleurs Dictionnaires manuscrits, exécutés dans le pays même, et très amélioré ; il contient les caractères les plus usités, avec les avis nécessaires pour faire usage de cet ouvrage [...]. Le Dictionnaire [...] doit contenir environ 10.000 caractères avec leur différentes variations, nombre absolument suffisant pour lire les ouvrages communes des Chinois et pour s'entretenir sur tous les sujets » (Magasin encyclopédique, 1800, pp. 183-188).

Doctor Hager is going to publish a Dictionary in London, ready for printing, composed in China, compared to the best handwritten Dictionaries, edited in the same countries and pretty much improved; it includes the most used characters, with the necessary indications to make use of this work [...]. The Dictionary [...] should approximately contain 10.000 characters along with their different variations, an sufficient number for reading Chinese common works and for talking about any subject.

In addition to this, the dispute escalated when Montucci discovered that Napoleon intended to support Hager's project with 6000 francs and to fund also a publication entitled "An Explanation of the Elementary Characters of the Chinese with an Analysis of their ancient Symbols and Hieroglyphics" (London, 1801). The scientific reliability and the academic credibility of this script were often subjects of heated debate in future European sinology,

firstly because Hager's poor competence in Chinese morphology did not allow him to get quality achievements in Chinese script analysis, secondly because the spread rumours about Hager's academic reputation ended up affecting his production. However, it must be admitted that most of the criticisms against Hager were aroused by Montucci himself, as he was envious of Hager's financial supports for his publications. Even though Hager was really determined to publish a Chinese dictionary, he never managed to complete his work, someone even doubted he had never started either. His course at the University of Pavia left no significant traces, it is supposed that he held lectures in the same way as all the "orientalists" of his time used to hold. The living language was not contemplated at all, the whole approach was based on grammar explanation and translation of classics.

The second Italian university showing some interest in Asian languages was indeed the University of Pisa, where Giuseppe Bardelli (1815-1865) by a decree of February 19<sup>th</sup> 1849 was temporarily appointed to a vacant lecture of Coptic, Sanskrit and fundamentals of Chinese<sup>67</sup>. As it was with Hager and usual for most scholars of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese language teachers and professors at the time were often specialised in quite a wide range of fields not always interconnected. Bardelli was not an exception. Fine expert of Sanskrit language, Bardelli was first appointed as assistant to the chair of Asia languages at the University of Pisa in 1843. Although this did not represent his first ambition (apparently he wished to become assistant to the chair of Holy Scripture), he seized the opportunity and moved to the Collège de France to improve his level of Sanskrit under the guidance of Eugène Burnouf. Meanwhile, he also decided to move his first steps into Chinese language, tutored by a great sinologist of the French School, Stanislas Julien<sup>68</sup>. It is a well-known fact, however, that Bardelli

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<sup>67</sup> Antonucci & Zuccheri, 2010, p. 15

<sup>68</sup> Tortoli, 1866, p. 212

strongly preferred Sanskrit and biblical studies to modern Asian languages, that is why he probably was never particularly passionate about the course he was in charge of. The misfortunes affecting the Reign of Italy did not help much to arouse public interest in the disciplines Bardelli was teaching at the time, his course nearly had no students nor auditors, so it was closed down two years after its release, in 1851. For economic reasons, Bardelli was somehow forced to accept the position of co-assistant at the Laurentian library in Florence, where he started to become involved in other disciplines too. In Florence, in fact, he got a second opportunity as an academic linguist, more precisely he was asked to teach Sanskrit in the Istituto di Studi Superiori. Bardelli was well known by the following generations for the passion and the dedication he placed in teaching, he stood out among other scholars of his time for his firm beliefs in comparative linguistics. He tended to compare Sanskrit with Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Egyptian, more than with Chinese or other modern languages; he was convinced that all languages could be classified into three big families and learners, once acquired the paradigm of a family, could take up the different languages contained in it quite easily. There are just a couple of elements in Bardelli's production and life witnessing his passion for Asia and the related knowledge: firstly, his stay in the Collège de France and his professional relationship with Stanislas Julien; secondly, the serial dissertation "Studi oriental nei tempi moderni" published in the "Rivista di Firenze and in the "Bullettino delle Arti del Disegno" in 1858.

As shown by the first two contexts mentioned so far, throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese language was none other than a fleeting, occasional and non structured phenomenon occurred in few pioneering universities. Chinese was often mingled with other languages, simply reduced to some grammatical fundamentals and lectured by temporary teachers whose cultural background had no sinological specificity. The political upheavals

leading to Italian Unification favoured the development of Asian studies in our country. In the variegated panorama of Italian emerging universities, the Istituto di Studi Superiori in Florence certainly stood out for its ambition and pro-activity. Despite the development of the Istituto got seriously jeopardised by the competition with Siena and Pisa and by the shortage of government funds, its wish to build up an intellectual reality similar to the one of the Collège de France came true in a certain way.

The Istituto di Studi Superiori of Florence, in fact, was the first Italian higher education institution to host an official chair of Far Eastern languages.

### **3.3 Istituto di Studi Superiori di Firenze: Antelmo Severini**

The Istituto di Studi Superiori of Florence created the first chair of Far Eastern languages<sup>69</sup> in 1864, and put Antelmo Severini (1828-1909), Bardelli's first student, in full charge of it. Antelmo Severini had a profound knowledge of Latin, Greek and some foreign languages, he was also a fine expert of law and philosophy of law. For his achievements in these fields, he first became professor of Statistics and Geography at the University of Macerata, where he was then upgraded to faculty Dean, and professor of English at the Istituto di Studi Superiori of Florence, in 1870. Some years earlier, in 1860, Severini was received a grant from the Ministry of Public Education<sup>70</sup> to broaden his studies to other related fields. Severini thus seized this chance to move to Paris, as Bardelli had already done in recent past, and embarked on the study of two Asian languages: Chinese, under the tutorship of Stanislas Julien and Antoine Pierre Louis Bazin (See chapter 2.3), and Japanese, under the supervision of Léon de Rosny. Severini himself witnessed he encountered several difficulties in Chinese language study, despite this, he got praised more than once for his

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<sup>69</sup> Lingue dell'Estremo Oriente

<sup>70</sup> Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (Today's MIUR: Ministry of Education, University and Research)



great advancement in a relatively short span of time. As far as we know, he was rather fast at memorising characters, probably thanks to the teaching devices mentioned in “*Systema phoneticum scripturae sinicae*”, an innovative work written by the 19<sup>th</sup> century sinologist Joseph-Marie Callery after being interpreter for the Ambassador De Lagrené in China. This work deserves to be remembered for some cutting-edge theories that strongly impacted the way in which following sinologists saw the formation process of characters. In brief, “*Systema phoneticum scripturae sinicae*” gave a first decisive mention to the existence of important phonetic components (later defined “ideo-phonograms”, idéophonogrammes in French) that *de facto* integrated existing characters and originated new ones. A century and half after the “*Systema phoneticum*” was published, the one of ideo-phonograms became a shared theory, whose boundaries are well described in Goudin’s definition: «la combinaison d’un sinogramme existant permettant de noter une syllabe homophone – ou quasi-homophone – dont il n’existe pas de forme écrite connue du scripteur, auquel est associé un composant discriminant de son homophone , et sous lequel il sera classé dans le dictionnaire» (Goudin, 2015, p. 41). To give an idea of the importance of ideo-phonograms and, consequently, of the innovative portent of “*Systema phoneticum*”, a large majority of the characters would be classified into this category, the 80% of *Shuowen* corpus and the 90% of corpus *Tongzhi*, still according to Goudin<sup>71</sup>. Severini, thus, spellbound by the fascinating mechanisms of distant languages and proficient in character acquisition, applied for and got an extension of his scholarship to keep studying Asian languages in Paris for another year. Soon after he came back, Severini was assigned the extraordinary chair of Far Eastern Languages and then, in 1868, the corresponding ordinary chair, by which he began to teach Chinese and Japanese at the Istituto di Studi Superiori di Florence. In the first phase of this chair, he devoted himself to philosophy

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<sup>71</sup> Goudin, 2015, p. 42

and religion: he published the work “Il Dio dei Cinesi”, an explicit reference to Confucian centrality in ancient China, he translated from French the textbook “Dialoghi cinesi<sup>72</sup>”, and from Chinese the treaty “Tre religioni giudicate da un cinese. Versione della VII massima di K’ang-hi”<sup>73</sup>.

With respect to his contribution to the advancement of Chinese language teaching in Italy, Severini has never concealed the various difficulties Italian learners were supposed to face once embarked on Chinese language study. The most innovative idea he had was probably the division of Chinese language learning into two stages: elementary and intermediate. Chinese linguistics and the ordinary learning needs of his students pushed him to think and rethink about a new disposition (or relocation) of Chinese characters able to accelerate visual recognition and activate mnemonic processes<sup>74</sup>. His research led him to conceive a Japanese-Chinese dictionary based on a system, that he himself had created, named *Clavis Sinica*<sup>75</sup>. This input system, whose name and core idea were probably borrowed for the theories of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century philologist Andreas Müller, claimed to clarify the comprehension of Chinese script by revealing the structure and patterns of characters. The didactic side of his work consisted in giving students a method to identify and build upon connections among related elements of the language as an important stepping stone to true literacy. The project turned out to be too ambitious to be carried out by a single researcher in a lifespan, in fact, Severini invested considerable efforts in designing *Clavis Sinica* until his death, being unable to complete it. Despite this, a first operating demo of *Clavis Sinica* was shown in the “Repertorio sinico-giapponese” (Le Monnier, 1875). Since then, the project has been revived and reformulated more than once in the

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<sup>72</sup> A work translated from the Chinese text “日常口头话” into French by S. Julien in 1863, entitled “Dialogues chinois à l’usage de l’Ecole spéciale des langues orientales vivantes”

<sup>73</sup> Paternicò, 2016, p. 49

<sup>74</sup> Antonucci & Zuccheri, 2010, p. 39

<sup>75</sup> In Chinese “释文解字” (shì wén jiě zì)

following centuries, becoming the source of inspiration for several dictionary compilers and software developers. One of the latest outcomes Clavis Sinica has led to can be found in the software “Clavis Sinica: Chinese reading and reference software<sup>76</sup>”, registered and released by David Porter from the University of Michigan.

Severini was in charge during the golden age of the Istituto di Studi Superiori, in fact, as a result of the first diplomatic relationships between Italy and Far East in 1865, the Istituto promoted the introduction of Euro-Asian comparative studies, especially in the field of politics and history<sup>77</sup>. Around the end of 1870s the Asian language department at the Istituto went through the most successful period of all times, three key-factors mainly fuelled this unprecedented upsurge: firstly, the foundation of the journal “Rivista Orientale” by De Gubernatis; secondly, the reception of governmental funds resulting from a convention with the Parliament in 1872; and thirdly, the institution of the “Società degli Studi Orientali”. This glorious moment was also very beneficial for Severini, who started cultivating the interest to translate Japanese works, became collaborator of “La Nazione” and, finally, presided over the Nuova Accademia degli Studi Orientali. Despite the undeniable credits and achievements Severini gained as an eclectic scholar, his preparation as a linguist had a dark side, not very uncommon for that time indeed. He had never spent a single day in China, and so did his mentor S. Julien, so he was almost unable to speak Chinese. Uncertain historical sources tell that Severini was summoned to Palazzo Pitti, in Florence, to address some words of welcome to the first Chinese delegation visiting Italy in 1870; his ability to speak Chinese was taken for granted by most of contemporary scholars. This belief was far from being reality, apparently Severini was hardly able to utter some mispronounced

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<sup>76</sup>Source: [www.clavisinica.com](http://www.clavisinica.com) (04/11/2019)

<sup>77</sup> One of these courses at the time was “La Chine et l’Europe: leurs histoires et leurs traditions comparées”, held by Giuseppe Ferrari in 1867

words to the delegation, that is why the challenging task was entrusted to a Chinese native student from the Collegio di Napoli. Someone said that this episode deeply undermined his reputation as a linguist, once he backed to his project *Clavis Sinica*, started losing his mind and spent his last years in a mental hospital.

The way Severini had been paving and leading for many years was now seriously endangered, risked to die out with no direct heirs. Luckily, Carlo Puini (1839-1924) took over his mentor Severini and attempted to achieve his projects. Puini was a brilliant student, praised both by Severini and S. Julien; his interests mainly covered areas like: geology, archaeology, ancient Chinese literature and Buddhism. Unlike his mentor, Puini did not get much involved in linguistics and philology, whereas he preferred to glance at China from a socio-anthropological perspective, especially after he was assigned to the extraordinary chair of History and Geography of East Asia<sup>78</sup> in 1884. His major works include the translation of three chapters of “Liji”, and the publication of the essays “Buddha, Confucio e Lao-Tse” and “Le origini della civiltà second la tradizione e la storia dell’Estremo Oriente”. Puini’s commitment to non-linguistic studies along with Severini’s departure from the scene in 1900 revealed the embryonic decadence of the Istituto di Studi Superiori. Chinese language teaching was then entrusted to Alberto Castellani (1884-1932) for a couple of years, before the Fascist dictatorship tuned the whole university system upside down. Around the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century a second, more powerful, emerging academic reality began to shine with a new light in the field of Asian studies, and directly competing with the Istituto di Studi Superiori: we are talking about the Regio Istituto Orientale in Naples.

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<sup>78</sup> Storia e Geografia dell’Asia Orientale

### 3.4 Regio Istituto Orientale

The Collegio de' cinesi<sup>79</sup> of Naples was originally a secondary institution born to host the young Chinese incomers and educate them to Christianity, so that they could spread the cult once back to China. Towards the end of 1870s, the Collegio took a different route and, aware of the importance of trade relationships with foreign powers, it tuned into a place where young Italian learners could study Asian languages and bring forward a flourishing trade policy. It was in 1868 that the Collegio changed its name into Real Collegio Asiatico, and launched some unconventional courses of literary and vulgar Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Hindi, as well as the more ordinary ones of English, French, Latin and theology. Quite an astonishing feature which made the Collegio different from the rest was the presence of native speaking teachers, who began holding classes even earlier the Italian teachers were hired. Cross-analysis shows that the Collegio was the first and only educational institute at the time where Asian languages were taught by mother tongue instructors, if we do not consider the so-called *répétiteurs* hired for a while at the Collège de France. Wang Zuocai (known as Francesco Saverio Wang) and Guo Dongchen (known as Giuseppe Maria Guo) are only a couple of names witnessing the innovative teaching concept of native speaking teachers in foreign language learning programmes. The attention to the living aspect of foreign languages is also witnessed by the methodological approach of the Chinese course programme, once more underlining the importance of the relations among different styles of script, and between script and oral:

«Nello studio delle lingue il professore di cinese dovrà svolgere la storia delle origini, sviluppo e modificazioni del sistema grafico de' cinesi, mostrare le differenze e i rapporti tra le diverse scritture e lo stile antico, e tra il dialetto ufficiale o mandarinico e

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<sup>79</sup> Bertuccioli & Masini, 1996; Fatica, 1997

gli altri parlati nelle varie province dell'impero» (M. Fatica, 1998, p. 232)

In 1869 Guo Dongchen was the first lecturer operating in Italy to publish two specific textbooks for Chinese language and culture teaching. The first one, “Il Classico dei tre caratteri” (三字经 Sān zì jīng), included the Latin transcription of the Chinese text and was particularly suitable for the acquisition of Chinese phonetics; the second, “Saggio di un corso di lingua cinese” (华学进境 Huá xué jìn jìng), basically took Confucian theories as a main cultural criterion to glance at China and presented a selection of excerpts of Confucian classics. In the last three decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wang Zuocai was also very prolific and contributed to Chinese language teaching programme in the Collegio with a couple of important publications: “Vocaboli usati e domestici con frasi semplici e dialoghi facili e brevi” (1874), and “Nuovo Testamento compendiato in versi memorizzabili e tradotto in strofe tetrastiche cinesi dal padre don Francesco Wam, missionario apostolico” (1894).

By the end of 1880s the Collegio stopped being a Catholic institution and became a secular university, under this new framework the missionary section was soon removed and lecturers like Guo and Wang were consequently dismissed from their positions. This turning point marked a change of direction in Collegio's teaching philosophy as since 1881 Chinese language (and all Asian languages in general) have been taught by Italian lecturers and professors, no longer by natives. For over a decade the chair at the Collegio was assigned to Lodovico Nocentini (1849-1910), he was one of the last outstanding students graduated from the Istituto di Studi Superiori of Florence. His perseverance and constancy in study pushed Severini, his mentor, to appoint him chair assistant in 1879, then he became member of the Accademia degli Studi Orientali in 1880 and three years later he qualified for university lecturing. In his first years of professorship,

Nocentini published the translation of the Sacred Edict of Kangxi Emperor, and the translation of some short stories and of an essay about the universality of Chinese script. His academic career stopped abruptly in 1883 since he got commissioned by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to work as a “young interpreter<sup>80</sup>” in China. Someone said he made up his mind to leave his academic position for his inadequate wages, others claimed he did it to make up to his poor competence in Chinese language. No matter the reasons behind his choice, Nocentini undoubtedly was going to seize the greatest opportunity ever offered to a sinologist until then, the chance to be first Chinese teacher in Italy to settle in China and study the language in situ while acting as a diplomat. Unfortunately, the reports about his job in China stated clearly and with hurtful words that he had shown very poor diplomatic abilities, which were certainly related to his equally poor skills in Chinese language speaking:

«Indipendentemente dai meriti acquisiti come studioso, come interprete Nocentini fu un fallimento e certo non giovò a quella carriera. Era stato il primo interprete di ruolo per il cinese, ma diede una prova ben mediocre, data la sua incapacità di parlare la lingua. [...] Preferì invece affrettarsi a tornare in Italia a fare il professore, perché l’ambiente universitario offriva possibilità di vivere più dignitosamente [...]. Senza contare poi che a fare il professore si correva meno il rischio di perdere la faccia, come gli era occorso, forse anche ogni giorno, quando faceva l’interprete in Cina.» (G. Bertuccioli, 1991, p. 22)

Due to personal health problems and to the sharp criticism Ferdinando De Luca, his superior in China, directly addressed to Italian Ministry, Nocentini moved back to Italy in 1888 with no remarkable progress in Chinese language skills. Two years later he stopped his diplomatic route

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<sup>80</sup> Lit. Allievo interprete

and was appointed tenured professor of Chinese language at the Regio Istituto Orientale of Naples, where he became Dean soon after then. After nine years in Naples, Nocentini founded the Scuola Orientale in Rome where he died in 1910 at the age of 61.

In 1914 his vacant chair in Naples was assigned to Guido Amedeo Vitale (1872-1918), an interpreter of Italian legation in Beijing. Unlike Nocentini, Vitale was highly praised for his language competence and diplomatic attitude; according to the official statements put down by the Italian ambassador Daniele Varé, Vitale had proved to be one of the best sinologists in China of all times<sup>81</sup>. Despite his good job, he was never really paid back and was never offered any upgrade. However, during those years he gained a sort of moral compensation for his efforts as he got appreciated as a scholar by Hu Shi (胡适), intellectual and prominent figure involved in May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement and Literary Revolution in China. As an academic, he focused on folk literature and published a work on it, called “Chinese folklore – Pekinese Rhymes” (1896). Some years before his professorship, maybe as a consequence of the long time he had been spending in China and the enthusiasm for the acquisition of spoken Chinese, he was the first scholar showing profound competence in speaking ability, it pushed him to merge this vivid interest with his passion for literature and publish “A first book for students of colloquial Chinese – Chinese merry tales” in 1901. His premature death at the age of 46 for a gunshot abruptly interrupted any Chinese programme at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples, whose chair was soon after eliminated. From this moment on, the story of Chinese language teaching in Italy, which had originally started in Pavia and Pisa, and then bloomed in Florence and Naples, was revived and developed in Rome.

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<sup>81</sup> Bertuccioli, 1991, p. 23



### **3.5 University of Rome: Lodovico Nocentini**

Chinese language first appeared in the University of Rome in 1876, year in which Carlo Valenziani (1831-1896) got the chair of East Asian languages and literatures. His cultural background was quite distant from linguistics indeed, he graduated in philosophy in 1837 and in law in 1850, and was also very interested in geography and politics. He self-studied Chinese and Japanese and had never the chance to move to Asia to perfection the language, therefore, as occurred to all his previous and contemporary colleagues in Pavia, Florence and Naples, he was never proficient in spoken Chinese. Despite this common lack amongst 19<sup>th</sup> century sinologists, he had the great merit of collecting a huge personal selection of over 450 books in Chinese language and 750 in Japanese language to enrich the National Library in Rome. His name is bound to Antelmo Severini's one, his colleague at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress about Orientalism in 1874, and to Lodovico Nocentini's name, the successor of his chair in Rome and the future honorary curator of Valenziani's personal collection of Chinese and Japanese books.

The role covered by Lodovico Nocentini (1849-1910) in the University of Rome undoubtedly stands for an essential pivot of the development of Chinese studies in our country. He was appointed a full professor in Rome in 1899 by Royal Decree, soon after Valenziani's death, and immediately started to collaborate to the creation of the "Scuola Orientale dell'Università di Roma" and, later, to the foundation of the journal "Rivista di Studi Orientali". His scientific production investigated a field which was barely unknown to other sinologists: diplomacy and international relations. In this framework can be placed "L'Europa nell'Estremo Oriente e gli interessi dell'Italia in Cina" (1904), the first report of his experience of "junior interpreter" on behalf of Italian government. Giovanni Vacca (1872-1953) took over Nocentini's chair until

1921. Vacca graduated in mathematics in 1897, then developed a vivid interest in Chinese language, which he had the chance to study in Florence under the guidance of Carlo Puini and, later, to perfection during his two-year stay in China. Seen the outstanding achievements, Puini saw in Vacca a worthy successor of his own figure in Florence, thus he wrote a reference letter to the University board to ensure Vacca would become the next lecturer of East Asian history and geography course. The request was granted without any extra effort and Vacca was appointed full professor in 1922. The innovative side of his teaching methodology, compared to the one pursued by his predecessor, was that he did not just show students the peculiar aspects of Chinese history, geography, philosophy and politics; but he was also used to introduce grammar fundamentals through the reading of simple texts in *baihua* or in classical prose<sup>82</sup>. In 1923 Vacca interrupted his contract in Florence and accepted the proposal from the University of Rome, where he covered the same role until 1947. Once reached the age limit for academic teaching, he had to retire from his full professorship, however he continued to teach for free until he was 75. His proficiency in Chinese language was undoubtedly higher and more structured than his colleagues', mainly because he took advantage of his direct experience in Far East. Actually, he spent two years in China moving from the coastal areas to the hinterland, facing the difficulties of such a hostile language and its nearly incomprehensible dialectal variants<sup>83</sup>. His passion and profound competence pushed him to teach out of academic environment as well, he was in fact director of the courses of Asian languages and cultures in the Italian Institute for Middle and Far East (IsMEO<sup>84</sup>), today turned into the Italian Institute for Africa and the East<sup>85</sup>. As Lanciotti reported about Vacca's natural talent and numerous skills, his devotion and righteousness

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<sup>82</sup> Campana, 2001, p. 342

<sup>83</sup> Ebook on [www.robertovacca.com](http://www.robertovacca.com) (16/11/19)

<sup>84</sup> Istituto Italiano per il Medio e l'Estremo Oriente

<sup>85</sup> Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente

were probably the two key elements which made him a reference point for Italian sinology and fascinated students above all else:

« It was always his earnest desire to fashion students and to help to start them off along the difficult path of Orientalism, with all the assistance his knowledge and his advice could afford them [...]. He was gifted with a prodigious memory which not only facilitated the task of acquiring so difficult language as Chinese, but also enabled him to remember all that had been printed on any subject that came within the field of Sinology. » (Lanciotti, 1954, p. 40)<sup>86</sup>

Vacca was not the only actor involved in the foundation of an Institute of Chinese studies, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Lu Zhengxiang showed great interest in the initiative, as well. In fact, after discussing the project with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlo Sforza in 1919, the Chinese Ministry transferred 92 pounds by cheque to the treasurer of the University of Rome just for the implementation of this great and unprecedented project. When the Institute was about to be launched, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs interrupted the process to promote and increase the potential of a newborn institution, which included a wider action scope (all East Asia instead of China) and that would not only focus on scientific cooperation but could also educate interpreters and traders. Thus, on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1932 the newborn Institute for Middle and Far East incorporated most of the funds delivered by Chinese Ministry and, no matter how long Vacca tried to carry out his pioneering project, he never saw the implementation of an institution exclusively dedicated to Chinese studies. During fascist dictatorship and the consequent period of political and intellectual shutdown, Chinese language and literature courses completely disappeared until 1941, year in which the Jesuit Pasquale

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<sup>86</sup> The text has been only found in English translation

D'Elia (1890-1963) was appointed free lecturer of Chinese language, literature and history, a discipline he kept on teaching for almost 20 years without being able to obtain a full chair. Once ordained, D'Elia spent some years in the UK to study English at the St. Mary's College in Canterbury and French at the Maison Saint-Denis in Jersey, two indispensable languages for missionaries moving to Asia. Then he spent three years (1913-1917) learning Chinese at the Zikawei College in Shanghai and completed his theological studies. Soon after he backed to Italy, in 1934 he was appointed professor of history of Missions and, then, professor of Sinology in the Gregorian University of Rome, two chairs he had in parallel with the lectureship at the University of Rome. His scientific production comprises very diverse works, from essays promoting missionary propaganda, to translations of historical and political treaties<sup>87</sup>, to reports about the gradual penetration of Christianity in China, such as "Il mappamondo cinese del p. Matteo Ricci" (1938), "Le origini dell'arte Cristiana cinese" (1939) and "Storia della introduzione del cristianesimo in Cina" (1942-43). As evidently emerging from his publications, missionary actions, history and politics always had a dominant position among D'Elia's cultural interests, to the extent that he gradually left linguistics out of his life. In fact, although he taught for a relatively long time compared to his predecessors, language usage and grammar have never been a priority for him. Despite his study periods in China had been beneficial for his intellectual growth and language acquisition, as a scholar he never saw language as a really interesting research field. Consequently, as a teacher he tended to give no importance to living language and to its practical implications, in his lessons in fact students were basically supposed to read and translate political or historical texts, inferring grammar structures under his guidance. We may say that, from an evolutionary perspective of CFL teaching in Italy, D'Elia's approach based on grammar-translation

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<sup>87</sup> I tre principi del popolo, Sun Yat-sen (trad. D'Elia), 1934

methodology appears fairly anachronistic compared to the great relevance pragmatic language and oral communication had already gained in the Real Collegio Asiatico and in Nocentini's approach over four decades before. What may be seen a leap backwards, a sort of teaching involution in CFL history actually had to cope with a harsh reality, by the second half of '50s D'Elia was the only academic teaching Chinese language in Italy. In other terms, it means he was also the only sinologist who laid foundations for the future academic sinology and paved the way for CFL teaching diffusion and popularisation.

### **3.6 CFL teaching since 1945**

Lionello Lanciotti (1925-2015), professor of Chinese language and literature in Ca' Foscari University Venice, and later professor of Chinese philology in the University of Naples, dean of Italian sinological community, in an article appeared in *Mondo Cina* in 1994 he outlined the trend of sinological studies in Italy since the second post-war period:

«[...] Alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale in Italia, chi voleva iniziare lo studio della lingua e della cultura della Cina aveva soltanto due possibilità: seguire i corsi presso l'Università di Roma oppure presso l'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, il più antico centro sinologico europeo fondato [...] nel 1732. Ognuno di questi due centri universitari aveva un solo professore incaricato ed un solo lettore cinese che generalmente prestava servizio a titolo gratuito. » (Lanciotti, 1994, p. 4)

By the time of his report, the mid '90s, the number of Italian professors of Chinese language and literature had risen to 15: six in Naples, four in Venice and one in Turin, Milan, Bologna, Perugia and Rome<sup>88</sup>. Compared to the first post-war time, the institutions offering Chinese language courses

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<sup>88</sup> Lanciotti, 1994, p. 19

were many more and much more widespread in the country, and the amount of students enrolled to Chinese programmes was way higher than the 1000 ones reported in Lanciotti's article. This figure had been previously confirmed by Mario Sabattini as well:

«[...] nell'arco di un ventennio, il numero degli studenti è cresciuto complessivamente di almeno trenta volte » (Sabattini, 1991, p. 165)

In the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, as already said, Chinese programmes were widespread on a national scale, nearly covering all regions from North to South. Their ideal collocation used to be inside faculties of Humanities, Philosophy and Foreign Languages and Literatures, despite some experimental courses were also activated inside faculties of Law, Economics, Education and so on. Data reveal that some areas actually bet on Chinese more than others did; an outstanding example is Lombardy where Chinese programmes are offered in nine universities<sup>89</sup> (between public and private) and are well diffused in secondary education too, especially thanks to the efforts of the Regional Education Office<sup>90</sup>. According to a research carried out by D. Antonucci and S. Zuccheri in 2010<sup>91</sup>, the list of the Italian universities offering Chinese programmes comprised 40 centres, 25 of which activated a Chinese course only after 2000. This data turns out to be quite significant when exploring the reasons behind students choice to enrol to Asian study courses. From this we can actually infer the increasing interest in Asian studies might have been propelled by an instrumental motivation, which somehow mirrors Chinese

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<sup>89</sup> [www.chiarabuchetti.it](http://www.chiarabuchetti.it) (25/11/2019): Università degli studi di Bergamo; Università degli studi di Milano; Università di Lingue e Comunicazione – IULM; Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; Università Commerciale “Luigi Bocconi”; Politecnico di Milano; Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca; Università degli Studi di Pavia; Università degli studi dell’Insubria.

<sup>90</sup> Ufficio Scolastico Regionale

<sup>91</sup> Antonucci & Zuccheri, 2010, p. 55

economic and cultural rise on a global scale. Over the last decade the situation has never stopped evolving, giving us new figures to analyse. As a result of an accurate research on the web, it emerges that today the academic centres giving the opportunity to enrol to a Chinese programme or course have risen to 48, which stands for more than a half of all Italian universities<sup>92</sup>. In almost every region there is now a leading university which has invested on Chinese programmes more than others have actually done. In addition to the universities already analysed in the previous paragraphs for their historical relevance, another remarkable academic centre, which stands out for its dynamism and increasing investment in Asian studies since the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century is Ca' Foscari University, in Venice. Founded in 1868 by Royal Decree, Ca' Foscari has always been consecrated to trade and business studies, despite foreign languages also had a relevant position in the education of professional traders. It was only in 1965 that the degree course in Asian languages and literatures was activated within the newborn faculty of Foreign languages and literatures. The first chair was assigned to Lionello Lanciotti, then followed by Sandra Maria Carletti, Mario Sabattini, Maria Cristina Pisciotta and Magda Abbiati. Ca' Foscari did not only prove to be very active in the promotion of Chinese studies and in the creation of several course curricula, but was also prolific in editing and publishing a variety of materials about language learning and linguistics, some of which have been adopted as reference textbooks in most of Italian university Chinese programmes<sup>93</sup>.

The unexpected increase of Chinese teaching programmes and materials on a national scale, however, has not been followed by a proportional increase in the number of tenured professors and researchers, which is evidently lower than is needed. It is enough to browse university

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<sup>92</sup> For the complete list, consult: [www.chiarabuchetti.it/dove-studiare-cinese-in-italia/](http://www.chiarabuchetti.it/dove-studiare-cinese-in-italia/) (25/11/2019)

<sup>93</sup> We are referring to “Grammatica di cinese moderno” (M. Abbiati, 1998), to “Caratteri cinesi (M. Abbiati & L. Chen, 2001) and to “La lingua cinese” (M. Abbiati, 1992)

websites to see that most Chinese programmes today are held by adjunct professors or lecturers, whose job instability along with poor materials and facilities often end up causing troubles to the normal teaching process: the continuity of teaching is rarely guaranteed, the number of teaching hours insufficient for the expected goals and, in some cases, lessons with native speaking teachers are not activated due to financial reasons. In addition, two reforms have contributed to make Italian university system evolve to a more European dimension, we are talking about the D.M. 509/99 and D.M. 270/04. The first innovation they brought was the shift from the traditional 4-year academic curriculum to a level-based curriculum: the new university system consists of a bachelor's level (1<sup>st</sup> cycle: 3 years), a master's level (2<sup>nd</sup> cycle: 2 years) and PhD level (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle: 3 years). The second innovation concerns classification and learning: all degrees have been categorised into classes and all disciplines into sectors, the amount of study load has been quantified into credits. Students, once passed the exam, are graded for their performance and earn a credit which basically represents the hours of self study, lessons, laboratory activities and exercises to fully reach the goals of the given subject. The reforms contributed to internationalise the academic system but sometimes this operation did not coincide with an actual rationalisation of the academic offer. Like what happened in many disciplines, Chinese programmes have undergone the effects brought by both the reforms, with the result that language courses often got parcelled into shorter courses or segmented into sections corresponding to a smaller amount of credits each. Generally speaking, this has enabled more students to graduate with much more ease and gaining much more success than before, in other words, it contributed to popularise university studies. On the other hand, most disciplines suffered from being split into sub-disciplines or sub-sections, especially because the integrity of disciplinary content is unnaturally interrupted and, to some extent, harder to grasp and acquire in its entirety.



### 3.7 CFL extends to secondary education

If French secondary education welcomed Chinese among its disciplines already since 1954, so did other European countries by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the UK, Germany and Belgium; the introduction of Chinese language in Italian high schools has been a much more recent phenomenon.

The first mention to introduce Chinese language into non-academic environment was given in 1991 by Mario Sabattini, professor of Ca' Foscari University. At the time he did not mean to introduce Chinese language in students' programmes; he wished, indeed, Chinese language or any other Asian related discipline became part of the teachers' training programme, so as to broaden the cultural horizons of future generations of teachers:

«[...] l'insegnamento di almeno una disciplina orientalistica, di carattere linguistico o culturale, all'interno dei curricula dei futuri insegnanti di materie umanistiche, in modo che questi possano acquisire alcune nozioni di base per affrontare in modo più ampio e articolato lo svolgimento dei programmi» (Sabattini, 1991, p. 166)

The hint given by Sabattini did not take shape for a long time, and this was probably due to a couple of reasons. On one side, times were simply not ripe enough for such an innovation, school curricula in fact had been unchanged (and unchangeable) for decades, no new subjects were introduced since the second post-war period. The first reform promoting school dynamism and personalisation of study programmes was the D.L. 59/97, the so called law on school autonomy, which had been conceived some years before but came into force only in s.y. 1997/98. This law provided new flexibility to school time management, mitigated the

prescriptive character of school programmes and introduced the possibility to vary the school offer with new disciplines related to the core programme up to 20% of the annual teaching hours. The second main reason was probably due to the provision of financial resources to subsidise the introduction of new disciplines, which does obviously imply a variety of costs related to new staff recruitment and training. The first attempt to start with Chinese in secondary level education was in 2007, when the Veneto region administration, together with Ca' Foscari University, launched a programme for teaching specialisation in Chinese language and culture, named SSIS<sup>94</sup>. The specialisation programme was stopped after the first three-year cycle but that was enough to qualify 10 pioneering teachers, which were indeed quite a limited number to satisfy the national need. Moreover, the qualification obtained had a rather controversial nature, as it had been conceived to be recognised on a national level but in most cases it was rejected out of Veneto region. Regardless of the legal steps to officially qualify teachers, several schools since the introduction of D.L. 59/97, had independently started to offer curricular and non-curricular courses of Chinese language and culture. The formal and decisive step on this tortuous path was finally taken on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008 by the Minister of Education Maria Stella Gelmini herself, who notified Chinese language would be possibly tested in next high school exam session. In other words, it might be among the eligible subjects to be tested in the written part of the exam<sup>95</sup> of a specific secondary school curriculum<sup>96</sup>. Unlike France where governmental policies influenced the institutionalisation of Chinese language in schools, the spur to introduce Chinese in Italian secondary

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<sup>94</sup> Scuola di specializzazione all'Insegnamento Secondario

<sup>95</sup> At the time, the final exam session consisted of three written tests and an oral interview. The first two written tests were directly drafted and released by the Ministry of Education and guaranteed uniformity and equality in the whole national system. The third written test was instead prepared by the single exam commissions, so it could vary from a commission to another. The 2008 notification announced Chinese language would become eligible for the second written test, in this event, the exam paper had to be directly prepared by a ministerial commission.

<sup>96</sup> It refers to the Foreign language track (Liceo linguistico), a high school curriculum where the core subjects are foreign languages, to be precise, three foreign languages for 5 years.

education basically moved in a bottom-up direction. The main players involved in this process were families, principals and teachers. All of them, in different ways and by different means, gave a significant push to the propagation of Chinese in the system: firstly, the families, especially belonging to middle class of urban centres, claimed for a more flexible and innovative school offer, which may better meet global employment needs and fit the newly shaped job market. Secondly, the principles and the head teachers, who found themselves in the difficult position of balancing families' requests for innovation, the conservatory side of school personnel, and the available margin of manoeuvre brought by D.L. 59/97. Thirdly, the teachers, most were unexperienced youth that started a part-time teaching experience as soon as the nearby school contacted them. In the majority of cases they had received no particular training, nor had a solid teaching background. What we tried to figure out by these few words depicts the unstructured scenario Chinese language underwent during its first phase in secondary school. In absence of a top-down policy guaranteeing national uniformity, the initiative took different forms and was carried out in different ways from school to school, and from region to region. The situation in high school was object of wide debate at the annual assembly of Italian Association of Chinese Studies (AISC) in February 2007. In that occasion, Prof. Federico Greselin, full professor at Ca' Foscari University, pointed out the guiding role of university in the process:

«[l'Università] può e deve ricoprire una funzione di primaria importanza nel processo; [sussiste la necessità] che si stabilisca uno stretto collegamento tra i docenti universitari di cinese impegnati nei rapporti con le scuole [...] italiane, con gli assessori regionali e provinciali, con le SSIS delle varie regioni e con i due ministri preposti all'istruzione...» (Greselin, 2008, p. 112)

A second even more important discussion on the same topic was held at the national conference “La lingua e la cultura cinese alle superiori. Stato delle cose e prospettive”, where several representatives from education, school management offices, trade unions and business world agreed on the «necessità di dare organicità e ordine alle sperimentazioni che si sono finora svolte [...]» (Greselin, 2008, p. 77). Other, but not minor, critical issues levelled by the spokespersons concerned the bureaucratic side of the matter: the absence of a suitable disciplinary class<sup>97</sup> for Chinese language and culture (today solved by the introduction of the specific class A111, then modified into AA46 and finally into AI24), and the lack of a national qualification programme for Chinese teachers (partially solved TFA programmes. See following section).

Probably the most successful experiences in terms of Chinese language teaching in secondary education were pursued by three regions which first designed and funded the launch of Chinese programmes in high schools: Lombardy, Veneto and Lazio. We believe the most striking example of investment in innovative disciplines has been carried out by Lombardy. Its school management office launched in 2003 the comprehensive programme “Parlare cinese, giapponese, arabo in Europa per incontrare altre culture” primarily aimed to push the school offer over the conventional boundaries, and include non European languages to better meet the needs of national and international contexts. In the first year 17 new extra-curricular Chinese courses were activated and 375 students got involved. Since then the trend has shown a progressive increase of structured curricular Chinese courses in public schools, as shown in Table 4.

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<sup>97</sup> Disciplinary classes (Classi di concorso) are alphanumeric codes identifying the different epistemologic domains taught in Italian education system. In the case of Chinese language, the official code adopted after DM 259/17 was released is AI24.

**Table 4***Chinese language courses in Lombardy 2003 - 2012*

School Year	Chinese courses	Non-curricular	Curricular
2003/2004	17	17	0
2004/2005	31	27	4
2005/2006	43	39	4
2006/2007	49	45	4
2007/2008	42	31	11
2008/2009	35	23	12
2009/2010	41	13	28
2010/2011	48	12	33
2011/2012	111	46	55

*Source: School management office, Lombardy*

It has been particularly significant the increasing impact of curricular courses over the non-curricular ones, with a consequent increase of students fully devoted to Chinese language in their weekly timetable. In fact, by 2012 over 1100 students in Lombardy already attended Chinese curricular courses. Statistic data reveal that the unexpected wave of Chinese language learners did not only involve Lombardy, but it spread across some other regions such as Lazio and Campania as well. Table 5 confirms this positive trend, showing that within a single year the 149 Chinese classes became 189, employing 138 teachers.

**Table 5***Number of Chinese language classes 2016/17*

Region	Number of classes	Number of teachers employed
Abruzzo	10	5
Calabria	1	1
Campania	52	25
Emilia Romagna	6	7
Friuli V.G.	6	4
Lazio	20	8
Liguria	2	2
Lombardy	32	34
Marche	17	7
Piemonte	6	4
Puglia	14	8
Sardinia	1	2
Sicily	7	3
Tuscany	6	10
Veneto	9	18
TOTAL	189	138

*Source: MIUR, 2017*

The diffusion of Chinese language courses on a national scale is not the only significant parameter to explore the quantitative advancement of Chinese language in educational environments. Table 6, in fact, allows us

to observe it under a different perspective, that is to compare Chinese language numerical consistency and the one of the other foreign languages taught in secondary school. As one can easily imagine, Chinese cannot be compared with any of the four most studied European languages (English, French, Spanish and German), whose status is both well structured and very consolidated thanks to a pretty long didactic history in our country. It can be, however, compared with other emerging, newly introduced languages: it is fairly impressive for instance to see that Chinese classes in 2017 almost doubled the number of Russian classes, despite the latter had been introduced in Italian school system over 10 years before Chinese made its first apparition.

**Table 6**

*Number of classes per foreign language 2016/17*

Language	Number of classes
Albanian	3
Arabic	9
Chinese	189
French	88.492
Japanese	0
English	198.547
Portuguese	1
Russian	101
Serbo-Croatian	4
Slovenian	1

Spanish	33.428
German	15.877

*Source: MIUR, 2017*

Still focusing on the example of Lombardy, we get back for a moment to figures in Table 4, so that to give a closer look at some measures carried out by the local school management office. In order to enhance the position and the steadiness of Chinese programmes in schools, the local government encouraged the involvement of the academics of the surrounding universities which could provide a sort of top-down counselling and guidance. The first step consisted in the creation of some materials (mainly worksheets and word banks) conceived for secondary school teaching and available open source on the site [www.progettolingue.net/orientali](http://www.progettolingue.net/orientali). The second action instead concerned the definition of some recruitment guidelines for teachers and mother tongue teachers (*Linee guida per la definizione sia del profilo del docente sia del syllabo di lingua cinese da attivare nelle scuole*<sup>98</sup>) to adopt on regional base; the third action finally consisted in the embryonic draft of a language syllabus roughly based on CEFR level descriptors<sup>99</sup>, which stood for the milestone of the national syllabus defined and released in 2016. Another essential actor fuelling the diffusion and, to some extent, the popularisation of Chinese language and culture among youth and adults has been Hanban, whose policies are mainly carried out by Confucius Institutes (孔子学院 Kǒngzǐ xuéyuàn), Confucius classrooms (孔子课堂 Kǒngzǐ kètǎng) and through the competition Chinese bridge (汉语桥 Hànyǔqiáo). In addition, in January 2010 the School management office of Lombardy launched a project called “Progetto Cina”, which developed on two levels: the commercial level and the educational level. Its purpose consisted in creating a collaboration

<sup>98</sup> Guidelines for the definition of teaching profile and Chinese language syllabus to activate in schools (English)

<sup>99</sup> Langé, 2018, p. 23



network between educational and professional institutions located in the region, able to promote policies for the diffusion of Chinese language teaching in Italy and, vice versa, Italian language teaching in China. The project was officialised in October 2010 through a memorandum of understandings, signed during a visit paid by some representatives of Lombard educational and professional fields<sup>100</sup> in China. A further step was completed in July 2010, 2011 and 2012 with a commission formed by professors from four Lombard universities who examined and ranked out Chinese language teachers and conversation teachers for secondary school needs. This unique operation, that no other Italian regions actually pursued, happened at a time when high schools needed to recruit annual teachers of Chinese language for curricular courses, but the Ministry of Education still had not set up official qualification programmes. This policy, despite being controversial and impossible to extend to a national teaching database, relieved the regional management office from the annoying matter of ranking every year dozens of CVs of aspiring teachers with hugely diverse academic and professional backgrounds. It might be pointed out that these regional rankings had no mandatory or binding nature at all, school principals could in fact decide whether or not to stick to the rankings for teachers' recruitment<sup>101</sup>. The practice has shown that most Lombard teachers of Chinese language eventually got selected from the regional rankings both for curricular and non-curricular courses recruitment.

The situation of teachers' recruitment became more stable after 2013/14 and later, after 2015/16 when the Italian government by D.M. 139/11 and its modification D.M. 81/13 launched two selective cycles of national programmes, named TFA<sup>102</sup>, by which some tens of aspiring

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<sup>100</sup> On that occasion, the directors of the Confucius Institutes, School management office director and some school principals left for the official visit in China.

<sup>101</sup> Langé, 2018, p. 26

<sup>102</sup> TFA in acronym for 'Tirocinio Formativo Attivo', a qualifying programme whose participants joined in by selection, consisting of a theoretical and practical training, and a final exam.

teachers gained for the first time a national qualification in Chinese language teaching for secondary education. The newly qualified teachers were then placed in regional rankings (more specifically called 2<sup>nd</sup> grade rankings<sup>103</sup>) and took part in the following selection processes for teaching staff recruitment. The two TFA cycles had actually some slight differences, but both included training activities equivalent to 60 academic credits (CFU or ECTS), divided into two main parts. A first theoretical part concerned the didactic activities related to pedagogy, school legislation (18 ECTS) and disciplinary teaching techniques (18 ECTS), managed and assessed by universities. The second more practical part consisted of 475 hours of training in schools (19 ECTS) and a final exam (5 ECTS). With regard to the needs and the features of contemporary education on global and national scale, the emphasis in both cycles was laid on digital (and technological) resources in teaching-to-learning process, and on the teaching practice targeted at students with special needs and particular learning disabilities. The reflection on pedagogical themes, the fruitful debate and the exchange of practice and experiences have probably been the best contributions emerged from TFA programmes. However, there is no denying that numerous critical feedback were also provided against TFA organisation and against the quality of its educational impact on trainees, as highlighted by Anna di Toro in the proceedings of “La didattica del cinese nella scuola secondaria di secondo grado”, 2018:

«In molti ritengono, infatti, sia giunto il tempo che l’inserimento del cinese fra le lingue di studio venga proposto almeno a tutti i licei linguistici. Troppo spesso accade ancora che ci siano dirigenti interessati a inserire la lingua nella programmazione didattica, ma non a strutturarla [...]. Un [altro] problema emerso è stato quello dei limiti di un corso di formazione per docenti

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<sup>103</sup> Graduatorie di seconda fascia

della scuola gestito dalle università [...] in diversi hanno segnalato come sarebbe opportuno implementare, nel percorso TFA, il contributo di docenti con esperienze nelle scuole, [...] molte lezioni, nell'impostazione e nei contenuti, vanno valutate nel contesto di una classe. [...] Molti abilitati ci hanno segnalato l'esigenza di poter avere lezioni dedicate alla riflessione accademica cinese sulla didattica del cinese, [infine] ci hanno segnalato che è stata poco discussa anche la questione, centrale per le cattedre di lingue straniere, del rapporto tra docente italiano e docente madrelingua.» (di Toro, 2018, pp. 148, 149).

In addition to this, another largely debated issue contained in D.M. 81/13 was the fact that, unlike other European countries, the qualification obtained did not entitle to any real workplace, which left many aspirants dissatisfied. In other words, the newly qualified teachers had the right to be placed in rankings which could provide a certain recruitment priority but were not entitled for a permanent job. To get it, they had to take part in a further national selection process (released in 2016) conceived to meet the national staffing needs. The process was completed when, in September 2017, the first 13 permanent chairs of Chinese language and culture (disciplinary class AI24) were finally assigned to teachers in five different regions.

### **3.8 National Syllabus: a step towards standardisation**

The propagation of Chinese language in the whole Italian school system has actually challenged the way of reshaping and programming some innovative teaching techniques, taking into account learners' potential pre-knowledge and the possibility to spend short or long study periods directly in mainland China. Soon after the “National Conference on

the didactics of Chinese language and culture in secondary schools<sup>104</sup>, was held on September 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2015 a working group was formed to jointly plan out a table of contents specifically tailored for secondary school programmes. The group was mainly composed by school teachers, researchers and professors coming from all over the country<sup>105</sup>, the members split in subgroups and focused on three main areas, being integral parts of the epistemological domain of a potential Chinese FL coursetrack: 1) grammar and functions, 2) lexicon, 3) culture. The group spent a year to edit the contents and compile them into a national Syllabus, which was finally released by MIUR in an experimental format at the end of 2016. The Syllabus has been designed to meet a concrete need: provide the secondary school system with a reference framework comprising learning goals, contents and vocabulary. It was designed both for technical schools and for lycées, mainly addressed to students learning Chinese language on a curricular track of approximately 100 hours per year. Considering the average level of pre-knowledge and skills acquired by the end of middle schools, the working group tried to design learning goals easily attainable in 2-3 teaching hours per week. The goals were scaled according to learners' potential attendance and the goal descriptors were partially borrowed from the CEFR; they were mainly laid down in accordance with the following six skills: oral reception, oral production, oral interaction, written reception, written production, written interaction. In a second operational phase, the general descriptors were divided into communicative modules which had already been conceived by the CEFR (e.g. personal information, personal features, emotions and feelings and so on), then they got further specified in a variety of topics, language functions, vocabulary lists and grammar

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<sup>104</sup> Convegno nazionale sulla didattica della lingua e della cultura cinese nelle scuole superiori

<sup>105</sup> The group components were Prof. Federico Masini (Scientific coordinatore), Gisella Langé, (Technical coordinator), Alessandra Brezzi, Chiara Buchetti, Clara Bulfoni, Tania Di Muzio, Agnese Formica, Gloria Gabbianelli, Tiziana Lioi, Luisa M. Paternicò, Valentina Pedone, Veronica Regis, Chiara Romagnoli, Andrea Scibetta, Valeria Varriano.

contents. The Syllabus, being a sort of first canon for Chinese language teaching on a national level, had to embed the European and international policies about foreign language teaching and endorse the huge effort Europe had been making to promote the standardisation of language competences in formal education.

One of the main concerns the working group had to face both in theory and in practice was the necessity to consider the unspoken prescriptions of the CEFR on one side, and the impossibility to adapt the learning standards which had been conceived for European languages to a typologically and historically distant language, as Chinese indeed is. In the great effort to adhere to more than a parameter, the working group made the decision to go beyond the boundaries of European recommendations, and partially meet the standards set in mainland China for CFL. The most official source of language regulation recognised on an international level was probably provided by HSK (See chapter 1.7). The working group tried to make the learning progression compatible with HSK levels, both in terms of skills and vocabulary, and deliberately rejected the Chinese assumption according to which the six HSK levels (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) should coincide with the six CEFR levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). To avoid any misunderstandings and in the attempt to ‘certify’ the progression, the group indicated a possible triple correspondence connecting the levels of the two systems stated above and the learning goals expected by the end of each school year. In the Syllabus, we can observe that the second year is equivalent to HSK2 and the descriptors are compatible with level A2.1 of the CEFR. In the majority of secondary schools, from the third year on the number of Chinese language hours per week increases from three to four, so the expected levels become much more challenging: the third year descriptors correspond to HSK2-3 and A2.2, the fourth year to HSK3-4 and B1.1, and finally the fifth year is equivalent to HSK4-5 and B1.2. The

language competence per year and the overall language competence expected by the end of the 5-year curriculum comprised in the Syllabus is further determined in descriptors and topics, as specified in the preface:

«Tutte le parti di cui si compone il sillabo per l'insegnamento della lingua sono armonizzate tra di loro: alle abilità linguistiche elencate per ciascuna annualità dai descrittori corrisponde la capacità di sapere trattare diversi temi e argomenti e di sapere utilizzare un certo numero di funzioni linguistiche, lessico e strutture grammaticali. I descrittori sono stati prodotti tenuto conto in primis dell'esperienza dei docenti nelle scuole e nelle università e utilizzando i materiali disponibili provenienti dal QCER (Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le Lingue), quali i sillabi di italiano SL di convalidata esperienza. Si è, in particolar modo, tenuto conto dell'unico tentativo che sia stato mai fatto di adattare il QCER alla lingua cinese col progetto EBCL (European Benchmarking Chinese Language, [www.ebcl.eu.com](http://www.ebcl.eu.com)). In ultimo, si è inoltre tenuto conto dei sillabi per l'esame HSK e dei manuali a oggi prodotti in Italia per l'insegnamento della lingua cinese nelle scuole. » (Il sillabo della lingua cinese, 2016, pp. 4-5)

The working group reported that the choice of descriptors and topics had to be considered a synthesis between multiple teaching experiences and various reference sources, like Italian SL syllabus, materials edited by CEFR commissions and /schemes borrowed from EBCL<sup>106</sup> project. It is exactly, EBCL, an acronym for European Benchmarking Chinese Language, that contributed to orient the content progression and to frame HSK levels into CEFR proficiency reference. EBCL is in fact a project conceived to create a reference framework for Chinese Language learning,

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<sup>106</sup> Source: [www.ebcl.eu.com](http://www.ebcl.eu.com) (10/08/2020)

teaching and assessment in Europe, whose criteria are based upon CEFR standards. The project was launched in London in November 2012, and involved four university teams working in close cooperation on several goals, like: propose a framework of competence descriptors for Chinese in European context, raise awareness of social and linguistic differences between Chinese and European languages, focus on a communicative approach and provide a tool for the creation of curricula/syllabi and textbooks specifically designed for European context. EBCL project has brought to light the huge discrepancy of criteria for CFL learning, teaching and assessment among European institutions. The analysis also revealed that even those institutions claiming to refer to CEFR framework, showed different interpretations of what a learner ‘can do’ at each level of language proficiency, often making ‘arbitrary’ associations between CEFR and HSK levels<sup>107</sup>. These issues definitely reinforced EBCL team’s belief that standardization was needed. In brief, EBCL team proposed to frame language proficiency into 12 levels and sublevels partially borrowed from CEFR, ranging from A1.1 to C2<sup>108</sup>, as well as adapting the CEFR descriptors/‘can do’ statements to the needs of a CFL learner<sup>109</sup>. In addition to this, the Syllabus working group insisted a lot on the communicative competence, which had to be integrated with a specific guideline about usage contexts and textual styles:

«I descrittori si sviluppano presentando per ogni anno di corso indicazioni di competenza comunicativa (o d’uso) per le varie abilità: ricezione orale (ascolto), produzione orale, interazione orale, ricezione scritta (lettura), produzione scritta, interazione scritta. Ogni abilità è presentata da un descrittore generale

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<sup>107</sup> Paternicò, 2012, p. 6

<sup>108</sup> In particular: A1.1, A1, A1+, A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1+, C2

<sup>109</sup> More specifically, the French team worked on the written production and interaction; the German team worked on the written reception; the UK team worked on oral interaction; the Italian team worked on the spoken reception and production.

integrato da descrittori specifici che fanno riferimento a contesti d'uso e a tipologie testuali. Le descrizioni delle competenze delle varie annualità e dei vari livelli sono state elaborate combinando le competenze delle diverse abilità - secondo le sequenzialità indicate dai 5 materiali di riferimento sopra elencati - con le peculiarità dell'insegnamento della lingua cinese. Lo sviluppo delle competenze è stato calibrato e composto adeguando le caratteristiche dell'insegnamento della lingua oggetto a quelle del discente italofono nel contesto della scuola secondaria in Italia. Secondo questo principio sono state inserite anche indicazioni relative alla padronanza fonologica e ortografica. Al principio di ogni anno di corso è stata inserita una indicazione generale del livello che si intende raggiungere, utilizzando la progressione del QCER (A1, A2 ecc.) e del HSK cinese: si tratta di un riferimento puramente indicativo, poiché è opinione condivisa che non esista una perfetta coerenza fra sistemi di riferimento diversi per obiettivi, metodi e contesti. » (Il sillabo della lingua cinese, 2016, pp. 4-5)

Another often debated issue the group has tried to work out was the relevant role of vocabulary in CFL acquisition process. In the attempt to define the number of words to be acquired every year and to provide teachers with a clear lexical guideline for final exam preparation, the group elaborated a list of words divided in five blocks corresponding to the five years. The approach used to draft the word list is a word-based pattern (词本位 *cíběnwèi*), which a pedagogical model adopted both in mainland China and abroad which has been developed as an alternative to character-based theory (字本位), spread in France since the late 80s in secondary school. (See chapter 2).



**Table 7**

*National Syllabus, Year 1, Section 1.1*

**Tema 1: informazioni personali**

Argomenti	Funzioni linguistiche correlate	Lessico	Grammatica
1.1 Nome e cognome, età, data di nascita e compleanno, segno zodiacale	- Chiedere e dire il nome, cognome, la propria età, il proprio segno zodiacale etc., propri o di una terza persona. - Presentare una persona	1. wǒ 我 2. nǐ 你 3. tā 他 4. tā 她 5. wǒmen 我们 6. nín 您 7. guì 贵  8. xìng 姓 9. jiào 叫 10. shénme 什么 11. míngzi 名字 12. jièshào 介绍 13. yī 一 14. èr 二 15. liǎng 两 16. sān 三 17. sì 四 18. wǔ 五 19. liù 六 20. qī 七 21. bā 八 22. jiǔ 九 23. shí 十 24. bǎi 百 25. qiān 千 26. duōdà 多大 27. jǐ 几 28. suì 岁 shǔ 属 shǔ 鼠 niú 牛 hǔ 虎 tù 兔	Ausiliari modali (能, 会, 要, 可以, 想); Avverbi (不, 没, 别, 也, 都, 还, 很, 常, 太, 非常) classificatori (个, 些, 本, 张) congiunzioni coordinative (和, 但是, 或者); costruzioni di verbi in serie; frase interrogativa v+ 不+v, v+没+v; frase interrogativa per scelta alternativa (还是); frase a predicato aggettivale; frase a predicato nominale; modificatori verbali; modificazione nominale (的); numerali; Particelle modali finali (吗, 呢, 吧); parole indicanti tempo (今天, 明天, 现在 e altre in base al lessico); pronomi dimostrativi (这, 那); pronomi interrogativi (谁, 什么, 哪, 哪儿, 几, 多少, 怎么, 怎么样, 为什么); Pronomi personali; sintagma preposizionale (在, 跟, 坐, 到, 用, 骑 e altre in base al lessico);

	<p>lóng 龙 shé 蛇 mǎ 马 yáng 羊 [...] 29. rì 日 30. hào 号 31. yuè 月 32. nián 年 33. jīnnián 今年 34. qùnnián 去年 35. míngnián 明年 36. shì 是 37. bù 不 38. bié 别 39. shéi 谁 40. de 的 41. zhè 这 42. nà 那</p>	<p>Struttura frase SVO (predicato verbale); Verbi a oggetto interno (看书, 吃饭 e altri in base al lessico); Verbi di esistenza (是, 有, 在); verbi di moto (去, 来, 到).</p>
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*Source: Il sillabo della lingua cinese (2016)*

**Table 8*****National Syllabus, Year 1, Section 1.2***

1.2 Luogo di nascita, nazionalità, provenienza	- Chiedere e dire il luogo di nascita, nazionalità o provenienza, propri o di una terza persona.	46. chūshēng 出生 47. lái 来 48. zhù 住 49. zài 在 50. huí 回 51. nǎ 哪 52. guó 国 53. nǎr 哪儿 54. zhèr 这儿 55. nàr 那儿 56. cóng 从 57. Zhōngguó 中国 58. Yìdàlì 意大利 Fǎguó 法国 Déguó 德国 Yīngguó 英国 Xībānyá 西班牙 Měiguó 美国 Rìběn 日本 Eluósī 俄罗斯	
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*Source: Il sillabo della lingua cinese (2016)*

As shown in Tables 7 and 8, the words appear in a table comprising four columns, which show the criteria adopted for the selection of vocabulary. First of all, the vocabulary of each year has been divided according to 17 main topics, including: personal information (shown in the tables above), personal features, emotions and feelings, interests and hobbies, daily life, family, house, human relations, social life, holiday and festivities, journeys and accommodation, shopping, health, other services, environment, school, emergency circumstances. The topics are filled with vocabulary according to the specific needs and learning goals of the year. For instance, in the 1<sup>st</sup> year the topics nr. 3 (emotions and feelings), nr. 7 (house), nr. 9 and 10 (social life; holiday and festivities), nr. 13 and 14 (health and other services)

as well as nr. 17 (emergency circumstances) do not contain any word as these topics are not target topics of the 1<sup>st</sup> study year. A second parameter vocabulary section is subject to its communicative purpose, placed in the left column. In fact, in each year all the topics have been divided into more specific communicative actions, which, in the case of topic 1 “personal information” are four: self introduction, introduction of somebody else and Chinese zodiac (section 1.1 in table 7); nationality and place of birth (section 1.2 in table 8), school level and personal contacts. It is mostly according to them that the separation of vocabulary sections is actually made:

«La sezione Temi-Funzioni-Lessico-Grammatica, partendo dai descrittori prodotti, elenca anzitutto anno per anno i temi e gli argomenti che potranno essere affrontati in classe. È opportuno sottolineare che uno stesso tema, trattato al primo anno con vocabolario e strutture semplici, può essere affrontato anche negli anni successivi con maggiore accuratezza e complessità lessicale e grammaticale. Le Funzioni linguistiche sono strettamente correlate ai temi e, per ciascuno di essi, se ne possono mettere in pratica più d’una nella stessa annualità o nel corso degli anni, con lo stesso processo di complessità graduale seguito in tutte le sezioni. Per i Temi e le Funzioni si sono utilizzati i materiali prodotti dal CoE (Consiglio d’Europa, [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)) e dal già citato progetto EBCL.» (Il sillabo della lingua cinese, 2016, p. 5)

The third important criterion vocabulary is subject to consists in the grammar patterns, placed in the right column. The way chosen to list them is slightly different from the one chosen for communicative purposes, in fact the grammatical structures do not follow the same division in sections, they are indeed fully stated at the beginning of each school year and shown up

in alphabetical order in Italian language: basic auxiliary verbs, basic adverbs, basic measure words, coordinative conjunctions and so on. Each section words are marked by a progressive number, grouped by communicative action and shown in a ‘natural’ order of appearance, as it can be observed in the case of personal pronouns listed in Table 7 section 1.1 (我, 你, 他, 她, 我们, 您 ). Some of the words are not marked by any number (Table 8 section 1.2: 法国、德国、英国、西班牙、美国、日本、俄罗斯), this implies they are connected to the words of the same block by a semantic or a morphological bond, but they are not part of the target language of the Syllabus, they simply act as a potential expansion of vocabulary. Words are shown in pinyin with tones and characters, without any indication about their grammar category. In the descriptive preface of the Syllabus, the working group has clarified the sources and the methodology used to pick the words of every study year. Being communication the major learning objective emerging from the Syllabus, the working group focused more on semantic, cultural and situational criteria rather than on word occurrence to edit the word list:

«La sezione del lessico è stata realizzata sulla base dei Descrittori e dei Temi-Funzioni e tenendo conto, per la selezione e distribuzione dei lemmi nei diversi livelli di competenza linguistica, di tre fonti principali: la certificazione HSK, *l’International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education* e il lessico di alta frequenza d’uso incluso in opere lessicografiche destinate ad apprendenti di cinese. I criteri semantico-culturali e situazionali hanno prevalso su quelli statistici per offrire agli apprendenti il materiale linguistico necessario per parlare, comprendere, leggere e scrivere sui temi previsti.» (Il sillabo della lingua cinese, 2016, p. 5)

The total number of words is reset at the beginning of each study year, and includes 259 target words for the 1<sup>st</sup> year, 248 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 253 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, 302 for the 4<sup>th</sup> year and 330 for the 5<sup>th</sup> year. As well as appearing in a table, the vocabulary is also available in other two formats at the end of the Syllabus: word lists arranged by years and a bare and full word list with the mere indication of the year of collocation on the right. The total amount of words contained in the Syllabus reaches up 1392 units. It is necessary to remind the Syllabus is designed for students attending an average of 100 Chinese classes per year (a realistic number oscillating from 99 to 132), every class lasting 50 minutes to an hour. Very difficult though it might be to compare and contrast the lemmas of Syllabus with the 400 essential characters contained in the French SMIC, firstly elaborated by J. Bellassen and F. Audry-Iljic. Regardless of the central position characters have had in Chinese studies and in Chinese language pedagogy, even more influential in continental Europe after the French 字本位 pattern was legitimised and popularised, the Italian Syllabus has been designed around the word-based pattern (词本位), a model morphologically and pedagogically closer to European language teaching philosophy and, for this, broadly used in mainland China in CFL programmes. In it hard, indeed, to compare the two patterns in terms of pedagogical efficiency and impact on acquisition. On the French side because the SMIC has been reviewed over the years and integrated by other methodological sources which have somehow altered the pedagogical scenery; on the Italian side because the experimental phase of the Syllabus on the first cycle of learners is not over yet, as it normally takes five years to be completed. The first data will be approximately available in 2022, and, we reckon, by that time only a part of national high schools will have adopted the Syllabus as a stable guideline so data will not be fully reliable. Another distinguishing element consists in the nature of the two patterns, if SMIC in France has been highly prescriptive and systematic since the late 80s and progressively diluted in the years, the

Italian Syllabus is a mere pedagogical guideline much closer to a recommendation than to a constraint. It is beyond doubt, however, that both SMIC and Syllabus have strongly inspired the production of textbooks<sup>110</sup> specifically designed for national learners, sticking to nationally recognised standards and, sometimes, sharing common views on learning goals. We believe the comparative analysis of French and Italian textbooks might be an interesting field to further explore how the policies on language pedagogy and the evolution of theoretical approaches to language teaching and acquisition have actually been translated into concrete teaching materials for CFL in the two countries. In addition, this research may give us the extra chance to take a closer look at the strategies and methods carried out by daily teaching practice.

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<sup>110</sup> As for the SMIC, we can mention: « Méthode d'Initiation à la langue et à l'écriture chinoises » (Bellassen, 1989), « Perfectionnement à la langue et à l'écriture chinoise » (Bellassen, Zhang, 1991), « Le chinois par boules de neige » (Bellassen, Liu, 2012), « A la découverte du chinois » (Bellassen, Cornet, 2010). As for the Italian Syllabus, we can mention « Parliamo cinese vol. 1, 2, 3 » (Masini, Zhang, Gabbianelli, Wang, 2016-2020),

## **SECOND PART**

### **Approaches, methods and materials**



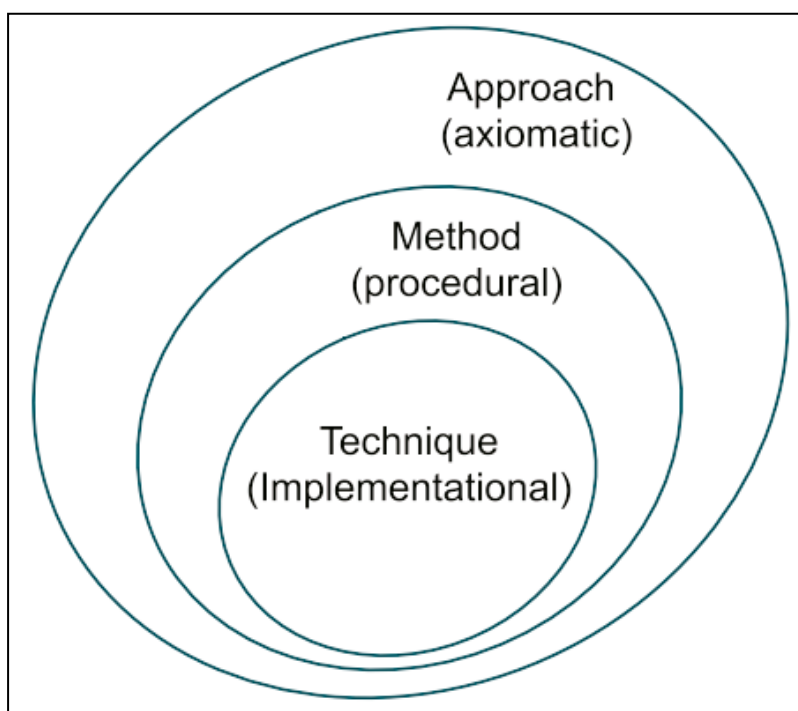
## CHAPTER 4. Teaching process: players and factors

### 4.1 Introduction

In contemporary societies, language teaching has developed into a very complex pedagogical area, which has been strongly influenced by various scientific models. Regardless of what the teaching subject is - might it be the native language, a second language, a foreign language, a dialect of a folk language, any knowledge needs to be properly organised and arranged into a hierarchy to be usable. In a historical scenery with many potential non hierarchical references, we believe a good point to start might be the organisational model firstly conceived by Edward Anthony<sup>111</sup> at the end of 60s (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

#### *Anthony's organisational model*



Source: <https://www.newroutes.com.br> (15/02/2020)

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<sup>111</sup> E. Anthony (1963), pp. 63-67

Anthony (and the following SL mainstreams) believes language teaching is a theoretical-practical science, whose organisation stands on three key concepts arranged in a hierarchic way. His model in fact separates the theoretical knowledge one can take from recognised theories or from self elaborated theories (Approach), from the arrangement of this knowledge into a practical procedure oriented to language pedagogy (Method), once more from the concrete use of theory and procedure to design and implement specific pedagogical actions (Technique). From the model, the hierarchic pattern of the three concepts is clearly visible, but another aspect emerges as well: the exchange between theoretical approaches and teaching practice, as if the three circles were one containing the other, vice versa, one the essential component of the other. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the distinction between approach and method was not that clear, in fact both theoretical and practical aspects were comprised in the definition of “method”. In more recent times, “approach” has acquired its modern meaning, getting to define the background philosophy, the source of inspiration which lies behind any practical action, the idea one has about the object (language), the related notions (culture), the actors of the process (teachers and learners) and the process itself (teaching). “Method”, instead, defines the translation of backing theories into operational procedures, into tools aimed to project and organise the language education. Another common misunderstanding which has been finally clarified between the 80s and the 90s consists in the difficulty to distinguish “methods” and “techniques”. For this, we report the clarification Paolo Balboni provides:

«Si noti bene: Il metodo non si occupa specificamente delle tecniche di classe (scelte multiple, domande, griglie, dialoghi ecc.: le tecniche fanno parte del grande patrimonio di attività proposte dalla *metodologia didattica* nell’ambito delle scienze dell’educazione), ma di strumenti di organizzazione

dell'educazione linguistica: definizione del curricolo, dei livelli, degli strumenti di programmazione, degli impianti della verifica e della certificazione e così via.» (Balboni, 2016, p. 10)

As evidenced by his words, Balboni takes once more the concept elaborated by Anthony and identifies two main steps in language teaching process. The first step includes the acknowledgment of a theory and its consequent translation into an organisational project, outlined through a procedure or a series of procedures. The second step consists in the transformation of the whole project into action. Teachers are the major actors of the scene, they would pick among a huge variety of teaching techniques (further diversified in strategies, tools and materials) the most adequate ones to the method (procedure) and consistent with the approach (background philosophy).

In this section, we will cover the approaches and methods developed in the field of SL education since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West. Then we will focus on those which have strongly impacted CFL pedagogy in Europe, mainly in our two target countries, with a particular attention to their manifestation in textbooks and their potential translation into techniques and teaching actions. To carry all this out, we should spot the passengers of our journey, the essential components of the process we intend to analyse. Firstly the performers -teachers and learners-, secondly the reference theories -approaches and paths- and finally the methodology - techniques, tools and materials.

#### **4.2.1 The teacher's role**

For centuries, in the West and the East, the essence of teaching activity is based on the nature and the roles of three components and their relations: the learner, the teacher and the subject. In a traditional representation of this game of roles, the learner and the subject (in our

specific case, the language and its culture) are in balance, and it is between them two that the main interaction is performed, resulting in the acquisition. The delicate position of the teacher can be compared to the one of a “movie director”<sup>112</sup>, whose ideal function is to connect the other two poles, convey information fluxes between them, without either of them prevailing over the other. Teacher’s role is surely less visible than the others on the stage, but not for this less important; exactly as a film maker normally does, the teacher has the faculty to scale down and up the extent of the other two elements, according to necessity and opportunity. In continental Europe the teacher has been for centuries a model of spirituality, morality and culture, getting inspiration from the classical figures of *pedagogus*, *grammaticus* or *magister* (a *magis*, someone who is above the average). His function did not necessarily merge with the figure of a didactician (etymologically from the Greek *didáskō*, to teach), it happened quite rarely indeed. The paradigm that “mastering a discipline is far enough to teach it” became a standard in Italy after 1923, when the Gentile reform came into force. Despite the evidence brought by educational studies, the situation today is still affected by this belief, which is still strongly accepted and supported in various educational environments, mostly in traditional secondary schools and some university branches. It is only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the figure of teachers got redefined in its form and substance. After centuries, the teacher became a professional figure formally and substantially separated from the scholar’s one. This did not imply that the two roles could no longer coincide to some extent, they certainly could, but the teacher started to develop expertise in disciplinary teaching, whilst the scholar kept an active role in disciplinary research and dissemination. This has probably been the first successful and semi-institutional attempt to draw a dividing line between scholar and teacher, two concepts which have overlapped and merged for centuries in European basin. Since the late 70s

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<sup>112</sup> Balboni, 2016, p. 104

the teacher has tried to respond to several changing needs, both in term of methodological approaches and in term of acquisition-oriented strategies and techniques, thus it got modelled into several very diverse shapes and roles, as well outlined and explained by Paolo E. Balboni:

«Di volta in volta dagli anni Settanta l'insegnante è stato visto come:

a. *facilitatore*, secondo la logica di Dubin e Olshtein che scrissero un manuale chiamato *Facilitating Language Learning* (riprendendo per altro un'idea che risaliva a Von Humboldt); [...]

b. *consigliere*, secondo il gesuita Curran, promotore del Counseling Language Learning (promotore de) i metodi clinici [...] metodi in cui spesso la sua funzione ci ricorda più quella di psicoterapeuta che di *counselor*;

c. *maieuta*, secondo la *silent way* dello svizzero Gattengo [...] e, in parte, nell'approccio naturale di Krashen e Terrell [...]: colui che con poche domande semplici stimola lo studente ad esplorare la lingua , farsi ipotesi [...];

d. *tutore*, a partire dagli anni Novanta, soprattutto nella formazione degli adulti e nella formazione a distanza [...], la logica del tutor, come si dice oggi con una parola inglese che riprende totalmente l'originale latino, è quello di garantire sostegno e protezione lungo un itinerario che non (porta) all'acquisizione di una lingua e l'esplorazione di una cultura straniera;

e. *regista*, nella concezione freddiana: sta dietro le quinte e guida gli studenti-attori [...]» (Balboni, 2016, p. 105)

All these denominations corresponding to as many roles have been supported in turn by very diverse and worldwide prominent language teaching approaches, however they do have a point in common: the evidence that teacher is no longer the traditionally omniscient and powerful *magister*, but has evolved into a professional figure, whose service can act as an important reference for others without possibly cross the line of self-reference.

#### **4.2.2 The relevance of teaching attitudes and tools**

In language education, especially in SL education, any teaching activity is likely to be supported or entirely conveyed by communication. Not a real communication, but a teaching-oriented communication, designed around a specific target and conceived for specific purposes. We believe that quite a clear view of the features of teaching-oriented communication may be borrowed from EFL<sup>113</sup> research and practice, and extended to CFL dimension with due caution. According to G. Hall<sup>114</sup>, the two main features to be considered in a teacher's talk are: teacher's talking time and teacher's talk. The first, the teacher's talking time (often abbreviated into TTT), consists in the ratio between teacher's time and lesson time, in other words, the amount of time in each lesson or unit used up by teacher's talk. Trying to avoid banal conclusions, however it is natural to think that, the more a teacher uses up time in a lesson, the less students will find the time to intervene or ask questions; the more a teacher plays an overactive role, the more students will be passive in the scene. This paradigm seems closely related to an aphorism made famous by B. Franklin which might presumably be crafted by Confucianism doctrine, and is as follows:

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<sup>113</sup> English as a Foreign Language

<sup>114</sup> Hall, 2011, p.10

«Tell me and I forget; Teach me and I may remember; Involve me and I learn.»

The overuse of TTT places a teacher in the first of the three dimensions stated above, at the same time it contributes to put the teacher under a spot light and makes him or her the real protagonist. This is what very often happens in learning environments of different levels, both in the East and in the West, and ties back to a conventional dialectical approach to teaching, which is being questioned and progressively replaced by most EFL teaching models. The second feature, the teacher's talk, mainly emerges during the first phases of language teaching and acquisition, it is a sort of "loan language" halfway between the native language and the understandable language by a non-native learner. It is characterized by a simple syntax, often governed by parataxis, and a poor lexical range. In EFL the vocabulary choice often falls on neo-latin words (*intelligent* may be more chosen than *clever* or *smart*), even though not always appropriately, as for CFL instead, considering the different difficulties it may imply, the choice is frequently made on the characters, the syllables or the compounds already mastered by students in the previous learning modules. To promote the comprehension and acquisition of phonetics, the teacher tends to slow down the speed while talking, to stress sometimes unnaturally the diacritical sounds and move the lips and the tongue in a very emphasised way, as if the students would learn more by their eyes rather than by their ears. Some scholars have compared it to the so called "motherese", the simplified and disrupted language mothers use when a baby child takes the first steps into his or her native language. The teacher's talk, to a certain extent, can stand in direct opposition to the precepts of authentic task based learning. The unnatural and studied use of the language specifically designed for a didactic dimension and purpose in a teacher's talk clashes with the principles of authenticity and naturalness

governing an authentic task. In this vision, in fact, the acquisition can be attained as long as the teaching activity replicates the real conditions, in theory no artificial devices should alter teaching reality, which stops being a simulative process and becomes a segment of reality. The debate can certainly be open to different interpretations, especially if considering the roles traditionally played by teachers and learners in a system and the goals learners are expected to gain in the process.

Another element closely related to teacher's role and having a strong impact onto learning process is the way the teaching action is designed, from the single teaching unit to the entire study cycle. Leaving aside the planning function that ministry and school governance exercise on an institutional level, the aspect which probably mostly affects our research is the teacher's planning function. We can discover in it a huge range of faculties *de facto* handled by teachers, the significance and the binding nature of these faculties usually depend on the freewill left to teachers by national or local policies. The effectiveness and the consistency of these faculties, whereas, depend on many more fluid factors: the theoretical views and the educational background of the teacher along with his/her field experience, the nature of the discipline to teach and, last but not least, the target audience. Faculty, in other terms, is a matter of choices. Exercising a faculty, especially in the field of pedagogy, consists in making a selection among the variety of approaches, methods, techniques, strategies and tools; it consists in identifying the appropriate resources – whether tangible or not– to achieve educational purposes. Talking about teaching resources is like sailing to the open sea, tools and media have multiplied over the years to such an extent that EFL teaching communities keep reinforcing the concept that almost anything can act as a resource for teaching. Until few decades ago, the only and indispensable resource both students and teachers could not do without was the textbook, where the



theoretical contents arranged in a chronological or progressive order could be easily absorbed through exercise sections, in particular for science and language courses. Since the 80's, the panorama is definitely wider and does not merely consist of paper-based resources, it includes a «costellazione di materiali legati tra loro in maniera flessibile» (Balboni, 2016, p.110). The figure of a single author in charge of textbook compiling is doomed to disappear, at least in the West. It seems instead more productive an «équipe che produce materiale didattico» (p. 110), a sort of global community producing teaching resources in a formal and informal way, which contributes to diversify the material offer and broaden the educational spectrum. At the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, resources for SL teaching programmes still mainly rely on the conventional certainties of a textbook, but are not necessarily limited to it. Traditionally, textbooks comprises a programmed path aimed to guide learners to a certain proficiency, whose level is generally codified by CEFR or an institution of language certification. Textbooks can be paper-based, available on a CD or online; they may consist of a single volume including several internal sections or be split in different sub-volumes, each one having a different target or purpose. It is not unusual, especially in middle schools or in language high schools, to see the main volume intended for class use (often called Student's book in the West and 课本 *kèběn* in China) accompanied by a second volume especially for home practice (Workbook, or 练习本 *liànxíběn*), which generally shows the same content progression as the main volume. Many Western publishers of SL texts, as well as some Chinese publishing houses like Hanban, Sinolingua and BLCUP specialised in CFL production, tend to offer a third volume, a teacher's guide (教师本 *jiàoshīběn* or 教师指南 *jiàoshī zhǐnán*), intended to clarify the use of the previous two volumes and give some tips for teaching practice. The fourth component we ought to mention is the manual intended for self-study (自学课本 *zìxué kèběn*). Someone may object it

does not really belong to the series, we believe this assumption is partially true, especially because it addresses to a completely different target, has to respond to different needs, suits different teaching timing and its methodology must consider the partial or total absence of a teacher, all these conditions are unrelated to school teaching. For this bunch of reasons it is right to keep self-study manuals out of the traditional concept of SL textbooks, but we also need to consider that the amount of learners taking up a second language on their own, out of any institutional learning context, is a booming phenomenon both in the West and in the East. This is why, even though SL self-study books will not be a significant part of our analysis, we reckon their worldwide importance cannot be underestimated. Media and digital resources is the second big branch of materials more and more often accompanying SL teaching. Chronologically, the first device ever introduced was the audio track. Available in different formats, it includes two main varieties of audio products, the “artificial” tracks on one side and the “authentic” ones on the other. The formers include dialogues or monologues specifically conceived for a beginning or intermediate learning audience, where the contents previously put down on a script, get vocally performed by readers at an adequate speed. The aim of such tracks is quite similar to the one pursued by the teacher’s talk, in other words, in the majority of cases they are artificially projected to meet a series of teaching requirements, from the inclusion of a limited and definite word bank, to the use of language functions mostly belonging to the expected level of competence the ideal reader should possess, from the unnatural talking speed, to the absence of a specific language register. Since the advent of media resources on SL teaching market, the artificial tracks have served as powerful and widespread tools for language learning, bringing the benefit to make students approach to listening and aural skills in a sort of more lively and interactive way, efficiently integrated with paper-based materials. From another perspective, the objection one can raise is about

their value, their artificial nature of these audio tracks does not ensure a natural and authentic acquisition of the language, which opens once again the debate already mentioned above. Some European sociolinguists<sup>115</sup> would refute this objection by claiming that (partially) artificial audio tracks are essentially designed to guide the teaching process along a scheduled route, a route which is projected to ensure a progressive and deferred acquisition. From this, we may infer that at a certain point in the evolution of SL teaching methodology in the West, a new idea about authenticity took form, the idea that teaching object (second language) should mostly adhere to authenticity, but teaching practice (technique and tools) can at any time distance itself from it in view of specific learning achievements. However, to partially meet the new needs this debate has brought to light, a huge quantity of “authentic” audio materials got produced after the 90s, in particular for intermediate and threshold learners. But what sort of “authenticity” are they made of? Authentic materials do not necessarily mean that audio tracks are collected in real life situations, it mostly indicates that tracks offer a selection of authentic language discourses, including an open word bank, with more lifelike topics. The ranges of vocabulary and functions is surely wider and do not limit to the mere content progression shown in reference textbook, the talking speed and the tones are definitely realistic and the whole conversation (might it be a dialogue or a monologue), despite being previously scripted, is the fruit of a spontaneous dramatisation carried out by actors or professional native readers. Following the digitalisation of learning tools, the audio tracks have been gradually integrated or, to some extent, replaced by resources available on the Internet or in the form of applications for personal devices. They mainly consist of teaching expansions, in-depth units or catch-up units released on the net. Most of them are copyrighted, accessible via personal code, and released on the publisher’s official

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<sup>115</sup> Freddi, 1999, p. 143. Titone, 1999, p.47

website and provided along with a textbook. As seen, despite the increasing importance of media in teaching, the use and the effectiveness of digital expansions is still very often subject to the primacy of paper. There is, however, a second category of resources not related to any paper-based material, they are available on free networks especially projected for self-study or teaching tips. In this genre, we may also include the teaching reality supplied by learning platforms (e.g. Kahoot, Spiral@ac, Quizlet and so on), which we will investigate later in this part. Regardless of the support medium by which learners access SL education, the advancement of digital and multi-media teaching resources have gone far beyond the audio tracks, whose peak of popularity was reached in the late 90s. Over last two decades the offer has multiplied in quantity and quality, getting to include tracks of any extension, clips, films and series for didactic purpose, dynamic pattern drills available online, several kinds of applications and so on. It seems evident that the textbook is no longer the sole dimension to rely on, there is much more beyond that. However, if strolling around most of the educational environments in Europe, unexpectedly we may find out that paper still preserves a privileged position in SL education, both in formal and informal contexts.

#### **4.3.1 The learner: fundamentals of learning process**

The learner is at the same time the subject of acquisition and the target of teaching activity. His figure and his role in the acquisition process have undergone a radical change since the half of the 90s, especially in the wake of psycholinguistic theories developed at the very end of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>116</sup>. One of the main remarks psycholinguistics brought to light was that no empirical data could prove a binding relationship between language development and the surrounding environment. In other words, the model according to which the pressures exerted by external factors would

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<sup>116</sup> Danesi, 1998; Freddi, 1999

determine the faculty of speaking and understanding a language through the so called *mental habit* was inappropriate to explain the phenomena connected to language acquisition and use. Psycholinguists observed three aspects related to language faculty which actually pushed them to this conclusion<sup>117</sup>. The first is that language acquisition process in children, especially within the first three years of life, follows very common patterns regardless from the socio-cultural environment in which the subjects grow up. The second shows that the same natural acquisition process observed in the case of native languages can be transferred to the acquisition of other languages, regardless from learner's age. The third observation emerges from the comparative analysis of most existing languages carried out by N. Chomsky, and highlights the existence of a "universal grammar" (UG) in anybody, a innate endowment including mechanisms and rules common to all natural languages which hints at the genetic nature of language faculty. These observations have not only changed our understanding of language nature, but have radically altered the attitude to language acquisition and, consequently, induced a change in the philosophies and approaches of language teaching. The assumption that there is an innate and genetically transmissible faculty of language peculiar to our species<sup>118</sup> did alter the paradigm of teaching, in its Latin sense of *in-signare*, 'to engrave', 'to carve'. Learners should no longer be conceived as moulds ready to be 'engraved' or 'shaped', in the case of SL teaching, ready to be filled with vocabulary and rules. But, conversely, they have become active subjects, naturally (even biologically) inclined to language acquisition and provided with a LAD (Language Acquisition Device)<sup>119</sup> an instinctive mental ability which enables humans to acquire and produce a language, especially in their early stages of life. The LAD is thought to comprise all and only the principles which are universal to all human languages. To make it work,

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<sup>117</sup> Danesi, 1998, p. 67

<sup>118</sup> Kliesch, 2012, pp. 88-94

<sup>119</sup> Chomsky, 1965, p. 25

the child needs access only to samples of a natural language, which serve as a trigger to activate the device. Once activated, the child is able to find out the structure of the language to be learned by matching the innate knowledge of basic grammatical relationships and the structures of the particular language in the environment. According to McNeill (1966), the LAD relies on four innate linguistic properties to function regularly: the ability to distinguish language sounds from other sounds in the environment; the ability to categorise linguistic data that can later be processed; the knowledge (or perception) that only a certain kind of linguistic structure is possible and that other kinds are not; and finally the ability to engage in constant evaluation of the developing linguistic system so as to construct the simplest possible system out of the available linguistic input. Still according to Chomsky, the acquisition is activated by the LAD and goes through five main stages, which can be roughly summarised into observation, hypothesis, check, rehearsal and reflection. The observation phase consists in the capacity of discerning a linguistic-communicative input from the surrounding reality. In the baby child it may be the correlation between a need, like the thirst or the hunger, and the attempt to say out is needed, like ‘water’ or ‘food’. In a SL learner the observation phase may be a class moment when the teacher asks students to underline or circle in an input text a particular constituent, for example the adverbs in -ly in the case of EFL or the prepositional phrases formed by 在 and 给 in CFL. The second phase, the hypothesis, consists in making assumptions about the functioning of a language mechanism. To do so, the learner at a beginner’s stage tends to use the findings gained by observation to generalise a certain linguistic pattern. It is not infrequent to hear English-speaking babies produce “goed” rather than “went”, or Italian-speaking babies produce “aprito” rather than “aperto”; or, again, Chinese-speaking babies use the adverb “不” to negate any kind of utterance. In a real life situation the hypothesis is formulated according to the observed input,

while in an educational context the assumptions are mostly suggested by teachers or by patterns included in the textbook. The adult (may it be teacher or parent) guides the learner to the third stage, the check, and confirms or rectifies the assumption. The fourth phase, rehearsal, aims to fix the concept in learner's mind, it may be a spontaneous or induced activity, in native language acquisition the baby often repeats a pattern, a word or a phrase obsessively until it gets absorbed, while in SL education the teacher tends to alternate repetition exercise (pattern drill) with more creative and constructive activities. The last phase, reflection, normally takes place in formal education, it is activated by teachers and tends to raise metalinguistic awareness in learners.

#### **4.3.2 The importance of context and environment**

Downsizing the role and the importance of the LAD from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, J. S. Bruner claimed that Chomskyian idea of LAD was not enough to explain properly the acquisition process, another essential component had to be included. Acquisition is a process which can normally take place under determined conditions, the presence of a guide and the possibility to observe environmental inputs for instance. For this, it is therefore important to consider the counterpart or the response to the LAD, the LASS (Language Acquisition Support System), defined as the assistance the learner receives from adults, peers and tools. According to Bruner thus, in language education the teacher primarily has to handle the LASS through teaching techniques and material resources, in a way to make the LAD fully efficient. However, even though the LASS provides a fully understandable input, the entity of contextual and emotional factors must not be underestimated to fully attain acquisition. As an integration to Chomsky and Bruner's theories, S. D. Krashen<sup>120</sup> observed that the LAD is fully triggered in non-stressful

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<sup>120</sup> Krashen, 1977, pp. 144-158

learning conditions, in conditions with a low “affective filter” so that to prevent the learner from developing any form of fright, apprehension or performance anxiety. The “affective filter” is none other than a « psychodidactic metaphor » (P.E. Balboni, 2016, p. 81) which proves a biochemical process in learner’s mind able to affect memorisation. In learning situations dominated by pressure, anxiety and perception of failure, an endocrine war breaks out in learner’s brain between the amygdala and the hippocampus, the first detects the imminent danger while the second works against the first to block the alert. The hippocampus in the attempt to stop the perception of danger is distracted from its primary role in learning: orient new inputs to and retrieve old information from the long-term memory. The conflict on a glandular level seen from an outside perspective, is translated into a slowdown in working memory process and a thick hindrance to acquisition. In fact, in contextual conditions pushing the learner to increase the “affective filter”, acquisition outcomes will be temporary and unable to guarantee a stable performance. As just seen, memory plays a great role in the whole acquisition process. It consists of a complex mechanism which can be catalysed or inhibited by a certain input from the teacher, but is always deliberate, voluntary:

«[...] il ricordare prevede un ruolo attivo, richiede uno sforzo deliberato; serve un obiettivo, una strategia per raggiungerlo, un processo di elaborazione nella propria memoria a lungo termine»  
(C. Cornoldi, 1986, p. 42)

In other words, memory is a voluntary project and learning inevitably depends on it, but when this project has to be translated into teaching practice, which attitude or method or technique contribute to enhance learner’s memory process? Well, cognitive psychology has demonstrated



that the deeper is the encoding<sup>121</sup>, the more effective is the memory. The deepest form of encoding is not syntactic but semantic, so a conversion process that «focuses on the meaningful aspects (of information) as opposed to its perceptual characteristics<sup>122</sup>». From a language learning perspective, deep encoding tends to make lexicon prevail on grammar, but to process vocabulary in a meaningful way a couple of references are needed, text and con-text. In the case of CFL, in particular, this may suggest that words should not be learnt from a list (See section 2.5) but from a text and from a situation (e.g. learning the words connected to health and medicine from text on Chinese medicine and/or from a dialogue between patient and doctor). But do reading a text and listening to a dialogue have the same impact on memory performance? The channels through which inputs are conveyed to learner's brain bring to different outcomes. It is common knowledge that iconic inputs are retained by brain for 250-500 milliseconds while the echoic inputs for almost 3 minutes, so, contrary to popular belief, learners will remember better and more what is heard than what is read or seen, as shown by Dale's cone of learning. It is estimated that a 'standard' language learner is able to remember the 10% of the read or seen inputs, the 20% of heard inputs and the 50% of the seen and heard inputs<sup>123</sup>. In the light of these discoveries, it is now inconceivable that teachers do not consider these elements when planning activities or, more in general, when choosing an approach.

### **4.3.3 Learning styles and language aptitude**

Other theorists have pushed onwards the boundary of the research on acquisition, questioning the fact that some individuals are far more efficient in acquisition than others actually do. May this observation lead to think

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<sup>121</sup> Here we refer to encoding as “the conversion of a sensory input into a form capable of being processed and deposited in memory” (APA Dictionary of Psychology)

<sup>122</sup> APA Dictionary of Psychology

<sup>123</sup> Kovalchick & Dawson, 2003, p.161

that learners have different aptitudes to language learning? In other words, is there any evidence able to prove that someone is more talented for languages than others? The response to this question is still far from being exhaustive as it is part of a hotly debated topic, it lies on a very fine separation line between acquisitional studies and psychological studies. It is indeed very hard to detect learners' talent for a discipline completely removing any interference originated by the context (e.g. learning context, relationship with the teacher) or by learner's emotional side (learner's background, learning style, psychological attitude, self perception). We have decided to mention this topic in this section as we believe that teaching and acquisition are none other than two sides of the same coin, talking about learners' talent may provide extra information on the performance in language acquisition, in particular when the typological distance between NL and SL is wide (as in the case of CFL). Not all scholars agree on the existence of an aptitude for languages, the mainstream tends to see the quality of the LASS as the main pivot for different levels of performance. There is no doubt that the type and the quality of the acquisition support do have a decisive influence on acquisition outcomes and their performance timing, but in the light of the great complexity of human mind, we are led to support the idea that the combination of some 'personal features' can favour language learning or make it harder. A number of empirical studies have found that the language learning aptitude has a low moderate correlation (0.4 to 0.45) with measures of intelligence, indicating that the two parameters are somehow related but not identical or proportional<sup>124</sup>. It seems that most individuals with outstanding linguistic performance have an above-average intelligence<sup>125</sup>, on the other way round, several reports in the literature remark how individuals who have mental retardation are highly proficient

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<sup>124</sup> Skehan, 1982

<sup>125</sup> Skehan, 1998; Source: <https://achilleaskostoulas.com/2015/07/08/is-there-a-talent-for-language-learning/> (07/07/2020)

in several languages as well<sup>126</sup>. Aptitude research was rather popular in the 1960s, when a number of aptitude tests were developed, with a view to using them onto language teaching. Probably the most known of these was the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), developed by John Carroll and Stanley Sapon in 1959, which was originally designed for screening applicants for the US Foreign Service Institute. The decline of structural linguistics, on whose approach these tests were based, and the arguably ‘non-democratic’ ways in which language learning aptitude testing was being used, led to the decline of aptitude testing in more recent years. One of the most influential models of language learning aptitude put forward by Peter Skehan in 1998 sees the aptitude as a composite construct, whose main three constituents are memory, phonemic coding ability and language analytic ability. Leaving aside memory for now, whose role in acquisition processes emerges from several researches, phonemic coding ability, according to Skehan, can be roughly defined as the ability to tell certain sounds apart, even if one’s mother language does not discriminate between them. Language analytic ability is instead « the capacity to infer rules of language and make linguistic generalizations or extrapolations» from linguistic inputs (Skehan, 1998, p. 204). Despite numerous findings seem to move in the direction of the existence of a language aptitude, what we believe is really important to understand on the teaching side is the selection of adequate methodologies and techniques able to optimise learners’ talent(s) and make the LAD fully efficient. There are several approaches a teacher can choose to achieve this goal (which will be the focus of the following chapters of this section), but before moving on to this, we believe it is important to highlight another primary aspect of learning attitude: the cognitive dimension. When confronting with learners, it is essential to understand their way of thinking as much as possible, and probably the most interesting aspect to detect is their half-brain dominance.

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<sup>126</sup> Smith & Tsimpli, 1995

In other words, the tendency each student has to rely on the right or on the left hemisphere before acting. Each hemisphere processes the inputs from reality through the senses in two different ways: the right one processes them in a global, contextual and emotional way; whilst the left one in an analytic, sequential and more rational way. According to the dominance of one hemisphere on the other, a phenomenon present in most of human beings, an ideal language class will be composed by a part of “holistic mindset” learners dominated by the right hemisphere and by a part of “analytic mindset” learners dominated by the left one. The first category will be more inclined to develop a certain level of reflection on the language, they will be eager to understand its mechanisms and to exercise control over its structures and vocabulary. The second category, conversely, will tend to develop a higher aptitude for the language use (either in written or in oral, or in both the abilities), often giving little importance to grammar and comprehension. We are aware that learners’ mindsets do not coincide with the concept of learning aptitude, they are not even *per se* influential on it, but they turn out to be so in case teaching approach and materials favour or disfavour one of the two mindsets:

« Queste due voci (*holistic and analytic mindsets*) di per sé non sono componenti dell’attitudine (anche se ai livelli bassi di competenza è più “adatto alle lingue” chi ha dominanza globalistica, contestuale, mentre mano a mano che cresce il livello di competenza è più “adatto” l’analitico), ma lo diventano in quanto l’insegnamento e i materiali possono privilegiare, quindi rendere artificialmente più “bravo”, l’un tipo o l’altro di dominanza. Quindi le azioni didattiche, dalla scelta delle attività al modo in cui le si conduce, dovrebbero essere equamente distribuite in modo da non privilegiare e non penalizzare di volta in volta metà degli studenti. » (P.E. Balboni, 2016, p. 72)

The distinction between mindsets and their impact on teaching and acquisition can be further expanded into a wider and more diversified field of cognitive psychology: multiple intelligences and learning styles. Roughly speaking, among the several intelligences that Garner claimed could be found in any individual, there is a couple of them seemingly having a decisive role in language acquisition, much more influential than the role they have on general acquisition. It is the case of linguistic intelligence, which is supposed to govern the social and relational use of the language, and logical mathematical intelligence more attentive to the formal and structural dimension of the language. Certainly, a teaching methodology able to activate all the types of intelligence does not risk to overstimulate some learners and leave behind the rest of them. The observation carried out in Italian high schools brings to light the predominance of activities calibrated for logical mathematical intelligence (grammar exercises and translation), while the observation done in adult courses and conversation classes at university reveals that most of the activities (situational approach and communication) favour more linguistic intelligence. The second variable to consider when adopting a certain teaching approach is the variety learning styles a learner can perform during his learning and acquisition phases. A learning style is defined as « the preferential way in which the student absorbs, processes, comprehends and retains information<sup>127</sup> ». For instance, when learning how to build a certain grammatical construct, some students will understand the process by following verbal and theoretical instructions, others will find it easier to grasp it from a scheme or an example, while others again will have to manipulate sentences by themselves to understand the mechanism. This notion of individualized learning styles has gained widespread recognition in education theory and classroom management strategy. Individual learning styles depend on cognitive, emotional and environmental factors,

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<sup>127</sup> Source: <https://teach.com/what/teachers-know/learning-styles> (19/04/2020)

as well as one's prior experience. In other words: this theory supports the accepted idea that everyone is different. It is important for educators to understand the differences in their students' learning styles, so that they can implement best practices in their daily teaching activities and assessments. Among the various styles a teacher would probably have to confront with, the three pairs having a prominent role in language education are the global-analytic style, the executive-creative style and the capacity-incapacity to learn from one's mistakes. In this brief roundup of the aptitude, cognitive and learning features affecting learning dimension, we cannot fail to mention personality and motivation. We are aware these two further elements would move the research to a boundless field, thus we will limit to discuss in broad terms their value in learning process. Personality is a wide and vague scope which commonly merges with the concept of "character", its traits are not specifically related to learning process but contribute to outline the individual profile of each learner. Three are the personality traits directly involved in learning, they reflect a systematic goal structure in learner's mind and are classified according to the nature of interaction with others. The cooperative profile belongs to learners who tend to integrate into a group and work in team; the competitive profile belongs instead to learners willing to lead a group or stand out for their merits or qualities; finally there is the individualistic profile which belongs to students who do not create cooperative bonds but nor do they want to compete with others, they just move on their way, regardless of any relational implication. The traditional profile having dominated the western learning environments up to the last decade, at least, has been the competitive structure<sup>128</sup>. An attitude that has discouraged cooperative behaviours in students and contrasted the introduction of cooperative learning techniques in teaching routines, mostly because they were not supposed to make students stand out for their individual merits.

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<sup>128</sup> Johnson & Johnson, 1978, p. 6

#### 4.3.4 Motivation, the learning catalyst

The last element we believe it is worthy to mention when approaching learner's dimension is motivation, a powerful engine able to impact both on process and on outcomes. As we have figured out in this chapter, acquiring information and skills implies great efforts. Efforts that, we have found out, are always deliberate, are modulated on one's cognitive dimension and learning style(s), are influenced by one's personality and, finally, can be stimulated or frustrated by external conditions. Considering the heavy burden learning often implies and the social efforts a learner has to face when taking up a course (personal time, money, mental fatigue, failure and so on), it is natural to think that the energy to do all this should have a source, which varies from an individual to another. This source, commonly labelled as motivation, includes a series of possible variants ranging from the psycho-emotional to the social. Numerous studies<sup>129</sup> have demonstrated that three are the leading motivational patterns having a strong influence on language learners, the first we intend to analyse is the ego-dynamic model and, to define it, we may refer to the adaptation of the concept made by P.E. Balboni:

«[...] Ogni persona ha un progetto di sé, più o meno consapevole ed esplicito: se questo progetto richiede la conoscenza di una lingua, la persona individua una *strategia*: decide di iscriversi a un corso [...]. A questo punto subentra il momento *tattico*, quello del contatto reale con il corso [...]: se si ottengono risultati non troppo distanti dall'attesa senza dover pagare costi fisici, economici e psicologici eccessivi, si rinforza la strategia e questa invia un feedback positivo all'ego. [...] Che cosa induce uno studente a ritenersi soddisfatto della sua *scelta* di studiare una lingua straniera? Chiaramente, il risultato. E nel caso

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<sup>129</sup> Titone, 1999; Balboni, 1994; Dörnyei, 1994; Ely, 1986; Gardner, 2001

dell'*obbligo* di studiare una lingua, come avviene nella scuola, che cosa può convincere lo studente a impegnarsi? Non c'è possibilità, secondo il modello egodinamico, di motivare uno studente adolescente a studiare il tedesco o il francese o lo spagnolo se nei suoi progetti di vita non c'è un contatto sistematico con tedeschi, francesi, spagnoli [...].» (P.E. Balboni, 2016, p. 83)

What is interesting to remark is that ego-dynamic model does only explain motivation resulting from free choice, not from duty, as the case of compulsory subjects in school. However, we believe an observation should be added to this, we should not forget that most of language learners on which there has been plenty of research are high school students or university students. So, with high probability, the choice to attend a certain kind of school, to sign up for a language curriculum or to take up a language rather than another have to be considered as voluntary choices, so we believe they might be included in the sphere of 'free choice', even though they cannot be fully compared to the choices made by an adult starting a private course. A second model is what Balboni calls "tripolar model" (modello tripolare), a model firstly designed to explain motivation in marketing which has been reinterpreted in a pedagogical key:

«Il nostro modello individua le tre cause che governano l'agire umano:

- a. il *dovere*, che regna sovrano nelle situazioni didattiche tradizionali. Questa motivazione non porta all'acquisizione, perché inserisce un filtro affettivo che fa restare nella memoria a medio termine le informazioni *apprese* [...], è tuttavia possibile che il dovere si evolva in "senso del dovere", per cui si produce comunque motivazione;



- b. il *bisogno* è una motivazione legata primariamente all'emisfero sinistro del cervello, quello razionale e consapevole; è una motivazione che funziona ma presenta due limiti: è necessario che il bisogno sia percepito, [...] funziona fino a quando lo studente decide che ha soddisfatto il suo bisogno;
- c. il *piacere*, motivazione essenzialmente legata all'emisfero destro, ma che può coinvolgere anche l'emisfero sinistro, diventando in tal modo potentissima - e può motivare [...] ad appassionarsi [...] se il docente usa metodologie che inducono piacere [...].» (P. E. Balboni, 2016, p. 84-85)

And he concludes:

«Il modello tripolare che abbiamo appena descritto spiega come uno studente decide se le azioni che ha intrapreso confermano la sua strategia a lungo respiro, rinforzano l'idea che imparare una lingua straniera sia una cosa utile (*bisogno*) e imprevedibilmente stimolante (*piacere*) anche nei casi in cui è impostata dal sistema formativo (*senso del dovere*)»

The tripolar model is probably the most comprehensive definition of motivation, which includes both aspects related to psycho-emotional sphere and traits connected to rational and social sphere. Despite this model theoretically responds to any aspect of learning motivation, we attempt to focus more on the empirical data collected on CFL learners. The evidence emerging from several studies conducted on CFL learners in US, Hong Kong and Europe<sup>130</sup> and, in particular, from a survey we conducted on CFL learners in an Italian secondary school<sup>131</sup>, shows that the majority of CFL learners in western countries are motivated by a couple reasons. The first

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<sup>130</sup> Wen, 2011; Yang, 2003; Sung & Padilla, 1998

<sup>131</sup> Rossi, 2017

reason is social integration (27% of the sample in our survey), so it induces to think the students wish to learn more about the Chinese cultural community because they are interested in it or sympathise for Chinese community, or again, emotionally identify with it. This datum is particularly prominent in bilingual students and heritage students, as pointed out in Wen's research<sup>132</sup>, but is also quite strong in Italian students. This phenomenon might be related to the increasing presence of Chinese immigrants in Italian schools who affect Italian students' emotional sphere. The second motivational reason is instrumentality (rated by over 60% in our survey). Most learners decide to take up CFL to get a future benefit from it, especially for career opportunities and personal advancement. Another interesting fact is that this motivational trend does not vary in its proportions according to the learner's age, but it is constant from first to fifth grade, with its highest peaks in the first learning stages, we presume because of parental pressures.

#### **4.3.5 Age-oriented approaches and special needs**

In the light of the analysis done so far, we can assume that the selection of a certain approach and the related methods must always be learner-oriented to produce acquisition. Well, in this view, there is a couple of variables we have not considered until this moment that should be properly thought out before programming any teaching activity, especially for their direct impact on classroom dynamics. The first one is learner's age. In the case of our research, the CFL target learner is mostly an adolescent student aged between 14 and 19 or a university student aged between 20 and 23, as we mostly limit to the bachelor's level. This age limitation is due to the fact that CFL programmes in Europe, in particular in Italy and France, have been mostly activated in secondary and higher education levels (See chapters 2 and 3), so the sample from which we can collect our

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<sup>132</sup> X. Wen, 2011, p. 41

data and make research on is mainly composed by “adolescent learners” and “young adult learners”, two categories often used in traditional pedagogy. It is true that in France quite a number of attempts to introduce CFL in lower levels of education (primary school and pre-school) have been made in last decades, but we reckon such a young target would need a completely different investigation in terms of approaches and methodologies, this is why we have decided to focus on high school and university students in this work. It is common knowledge that children tend to establish a vertical relationship with the teacher, as the latter replaces or reproduces the parental figure inside the learning context, while the adolescent students privilege horizontal relationship with peers. The first reflection on classroom dynamics this new set of relations may bring is the change of affective filter nature, the learner will no longer require the adult approval but will start seeking for the peer approval. As a consequence, the management of teaching activities (especially if done in pairs or small groups) as well as the correction of mistakes and errors gain a completely different perspective. Adolescents do not feel at ease when confronting with their failures, do not naturally accept corrections from the adults (something very natural in primary school) as it would expose their fragility, undermine their image and their role in the group. Once integrated in a learning community, adolescents tend to make a social deal with peers, a sort of unwritten agreement whereby nobody would stand out or fail, everyone’s goal is to set on the average level, neither too much nor too little. To give an idea of the impact this attitude has on teaching dynamics, we only need to think of how students normally react in front of public speaking. When a language teacher spurs students to answer a question or read aloud, it is very hard to see the student overtly take the challenge and put himself out there. The common tendency will be to timidly utter some words, in a low voice and with a non-native pronunciation, as if the student feared that his or her good performance or poor performance could bring

the judgement of all classmates. Furthermore, another inference we can draw from a close observation of young learners is that they consider themselves adults, so they will reluctantly accept tasks and activities they consider too childish, like, for instance, role playing, reading aloud and word ordering. A possible way, according to Balboni, to have young learners do it is «discutere con lo studente la natura psicologica e cognitive delle attività, di descriverne l'utilità, di presentarle come sfide, coinvolgendo lo studente nella presa di coscienza del suo processo d'acquisizione e quindi superando le remore relazionali che lo portano a rifiutare alcune tecniche didattiche» (2016, p. 93). In other words, have learners go through childish tasks (or supposed to be so) by making them aware about the steps to acquisition and presenting any task as a challenge. Having a dialogical relationship with adolescents is not always easy and, sometimes, using motivation as leverage turns out to be an effective way. Apart from English, whose role in contemporary society is evident enough to trigger instrumental motivation, learners quite often find it harder to keep their motivation on for other languages. This happens because, after the first learning phases where curiosity and interest govern student's mind, learning process gets tougher and tougher and the perception of one's acquisition is usually below expectations. In this case, especially for languages requiring discipline, what can catalyse motivation is the passion for the language or the culture (movie, abroad programmes and so on) and a teaching methodology able to keep pleasure alive. Instrumental motivation is here replaced by a form of endogenous motivation, triggered by the bond with the teacher and the perception of involvement in the language course. On the cognitive side, young learners develop analytical skills and procedural knowledge, two key elements which enable them, the first, to reflect on the language in a deeper and more systematic way, the second, to make language projections and more and more complex concept maps. Teaching approach should adapt to this evolution and start to

integrate the mere communication with more consistent metalinguistic constructs, fostering student's ability to classify, define and reflect on the language. Once again the central body of education is learner, it seems in fact that both the teaching approach and the methods should be adopted in function to learning. In this light, the second variable we introduced at the top of this paragraph pops out: learner's needs. The expression "learner's needs", as simple as it may seem, includes a boundless range of emotional, social and learning necessities which can put strain on teacher's ability to draft out individualised teaching programmes. We reckon the emblem of the whole category and maybe the sharpest peak is represented by special learning needs (SLN)<sup>133</sup>, a widespread phenomenon in European secondary education which, in recent times, has started to come out in universities as well. As M. Minati points out «diversity is a typical characteristic of a classroom, which is caused by differences in students' levels, interests, gender, abilities, cultural and family background, all kinds of difficulties and learning disabilities» (2013, p. 1). SLN is a massive category including significant difficulties in learning and acquisition, a number of them can strongly affect the understanding, production and development of spoken and/or written language. There are three main categories that are generally included in SLN: students affected by physical disabilities (hypoacusia, visual impairment or others); learners whose difficulties are originated by socioeconomic, linguistic or cultural disadvantages (migrant students, families below the poverty line and so on); learning disabilities whose origin is attributable to both organic and socio-cultural factors (dyslexia, dyscalculia and others). As for language learning, there is a number of studies<sup>134</sup> showing that not all SLN learners need specific teaching techniques, in the case, for example, of a physically disabled student to whom the adoption of some inclusive measures of special pedagogy will be

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<sup>133</sup> Colangelo, 1987; Minati, 2013

<sup>134</sup> Daloiso, 2015; McColl, 2005

sufficient. Students affected by linguistic disorders are instead a different field of operation deserving the attention of language teachers and textbook compilers, for them it is often necessary and urgent to evaluate specific educational interventions able to compensate the deficiencies and support the whole learning process. European pedagogy, especially in the southern countries, is doing a massive research in this field<sup>135</sup>, especially because the current policy of provision of modern foreign languages focuses on the theme of inclusion. The biggest impact of this policy has been observed in learners' self esteem and motivation. In fact it has progressively allowed students with educational needs to access the world as equals', since "inclusive education is essential to achieve social equity and is a constituent element of lifelong learning" (UNESCO, 2009). However, despite the numerous empirical data collected so far from primary education up to university, the literature does not seem to share the same view about the effectiveness of the methods and approaches used by language teachers. Methods and techniques are multiple, they may range from grammar-translation to audio-lingual, from communicative to situational, to picture-sound association practices. However, it has been proved that students tend to use more than one method when learning, it implies that teaching methods, as usual, need to be flexible and adaptable to any special situation or feature so as to pursue language learning success<sup>136</sup>. The same situation can be tackled from another perspective as well, which is that teachers also change their approaches and techniques very often, a move that alters students' consolidated learning method and has them acquire a certain degree of flexibility in learning strategies. Considering the state-of-the-art, it is very hard to identify a universal approach to language teaching, but it is a common practice (especially in primary and secondary education) to include students with special needs in

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<sup>135</sup> Daloiso, 2012, 2014, 2015

<sup>136</sup> Griffiths & Demetrovics, 2012, p. 69

curricular language courses to guarantee social inclusion and pedagogical integration. All in all, two seem to be the keys to make SLN students gain outcomes in foreign language learning: inclusion and individualised teaching strategies. Among the many, a technique integrating an individualised teaching model with inclusive practices is cooperative learning, a pattern of social mediation pedagogy<sup>137</sup>, as it encourages learners to quit their natural competitiveness and adopt a collaborative attitude to solve a common issue. To work the problem out, each student plays a double role toward his peers, he is at the same time a co-worker and an instructor. The core idea of cooperative learning is that each team member is assigned or assumes a role which partially contributes to tackle the task. For a remote and conventional perception, language learning and learning in general are conceived as a solitary journey, a path to be walked down alone, this is probably one of the reasons why competitive attitude prevails on the others. In reality, when students are asked to understand or produce a written text, as Caon highlights, a cooperative attitude leads to the outcome in a shorter time and in a better way, the whole group makes joint efforts to focus on the objective without anyone to feel excluded.

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<sup>137</sup> Caon, 2006

## CHAPTER 5. Methodological perspectives

### 5.1 Introduction

Teaching approach represents the core question around which our research has been developed. In this section we will explore the evolution of various approaches to foreign language teaching since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will dwell on their different aims and features and will try to understand their major contributions to the definition of contemporary CFL teaching constructs in continental Europe. Our scope of analysis will include Italian and French systems, with particular attention to methodological application in secondary and higher education environments. For completion, we will also observe how theoretical approaches and methods applicable to CFL have been converted into formal<sup>138</sup> and informal<sup>139</sup> teaching materials over the years, whether they remained uncontaminated or blended with others.

### 5.2 Formalism

As widely presented in the first section of our work, the most traditional form of language teaching was borrowed from the classical world. The dominant model in ancient Rome, then reused in Middle Ages and Renaissance in all European basin consisted in reading and commenting classic texts, without giving particular importance to the grammar. The practice of oral language at those times was given to native speakers (Greek slaves in Rome were selected for this purpose) that, according to the sources, used to interact with the learner with no care for structure and form. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in southern Europe, especially in Italy, a number of centres and universities<sup>140</sup> began to focus on the

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<sup>138</sup> formal textbooks and workbooks

<sup>139</sup> teaching materials edited and provided by teachers in class

<sup>140</sup> Institutions like Royal Society, Collège de France and Accademia della Crusca or universities like Université de Lyon, Università degli Studi di Roma, Università di Pisa, Università di Pavia and so on.



language as a discipline (See section 1.4), presumably because the international communication in Europe started to replace Latin with other two learned languages, Italian and French. Latin was no longer anybody's native language but it continued to exist as a medium of communication inside all the ecclesiastical circles, which were indeed pretty much involved in education, Jesuits and Scolopians for example remained the major suppliers of language education until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the social evolution, these environments welcomed the advent of modern languages and, as a natural transfer of models, taught them in the same way they had been used to teach Latin for centuries. This approach, then called formalism, has ruled upon language education for over three centuries and its residual effects are still alive in most of today's teaching practice. Formalistic approach inherited from previous centuries the relevance of classic text, but did not made of it the main body of teaching activity, they merely served as contexts to draw rules and formulas from. In fact, formalists laid huge importance on grammar; any aspect of grammar, from morphology to syntax, from phonology to vocabulary was reduced, or better, de-structured into formal rules and exceptions. To give an example, morphology was conceived as a sum of patterns, phonology as a set of pronunciation rules, vocabulary as word lists regularly classified into semantic fields. Despite the literature agrees on the fact that formalism declined between the late 70s and the early 80s, we support the idea that it has deeply influenced language teaching philosophy in Europe and, although hybridised with later approaches, numerous traces are still present in most of the textbooks currently used and in several teaching practices. At the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century the first grammar manuals of European languages started to come out, the core approach was based on grammatical schemes that learners were supposed to memorise as mental projections, the concept of rule was seen as an unchanging dogma that systematically banned variants, dialectal forms and differences attributable to register.

Students were downsized to the level of empty vessels ready to be filled in, a sort of Latinised *tabula rasa* on which teachers could engrave their set of paradigms (hence the etymology of the Italian word for “teach” *in-segnare*: engrave in, carve in). As occurred for methodology, teacher’s attitude in formalism also reflected the common practice inherited from clerical world, the proxemics during a *lectio* (lesson) vaguely followed the procedural canons of a church function: the teacher referred to a literary text, read it aloud, commented on it and got down the stage very rarely to interact with students. The hyper focus laid on written dimension emerged from the huge proportion occupied by translation in teaching process. Quite the only form of practice conceivable from a formalistic perspective consisted in translating texts from SL into learner’s native language and, vice versa, translating short statements specifically designed to reflect a certain grammar rule or a certain exception from native language to SL. Less importance was given to oral reception and production, it was common practice to present the oral dimension of a language merely through a set of pronunciation rules and text reading. As seen in section one, the strange fact to our eyes is that communication was not pursued at all, learners hardly grasped the gist of what the teacher read aloud, consequently, once called to do their part, they were not requested to produce anything original or authentic, but they had to cope with reading and dictation. However, the little interest in communicative dimension was not totally paradoxical for the time, as the majority of learners were educated gentry with a sedentary lifestyle who took language lessons for personal interest. What strikes most is probably the relevance this model still has in secondary and higher education today. There is no need of statistical data to realise that most teachers on duty probably, in turn, received a language education based on the triad grammar, dictation and translation. So it is natural to think that they mostly transfer in their job the approach their teachers had used with them years before. This assumption might be partially confirmed by

observing some teaching behaviours in high school and university. In both environments, language teachers are more used to reasoning in terms of statements or excerpts rather than in terms of full texts, this implies that language education is often transferred in a segmented, a-contextual and overtly grammatical way. Again, another filter we can apply is the observation of assessment criteria in schools, it is not uncommon in fact to see language correctness (orthography, morphology, syntax) prevailing on effectiveness or cultural appropriateness, despite the course objectives openly point at communicative goals.

### **5.3 Structuralism**

Structuralism, named after Bloomfield's language structures, was a leading approach in language teaching throughout the 50s which had its origin in Skinner's, Bloomfield's and Lado's behaviourist theories. Behaviourism assumes that any analytic investigation on human behaviour necessarily consists of what can be actually observed. For a long period, this theory was applied to a very broad scope, as it was able to explain a certain range of human behaviours, seeing any of them as individual's responses to events. A further enquiry brought to light the important evidence that stimulus and response were the basic couplet able to explain almost any changes in human behaviour. This assumption did affect many related areas, included education and pedagogy, and became a leading model to orient teaching attitude. Stimulus and response became the core theory of structuralism and started to characterise a series of teaching strategies designed to trigger specific responses in learners. Standing out among the several theoretical assumptions related to this are, for example, the pedagogical significance of rewards and punishments in classroom, the relevance of teacher's responsibility for students' learning success and, not least, a highly structured lecture-based approach and formal educational setting. Structuralism, in fact, promoted a teaching methodology based on

‘structural’ exercises called *pattern drill*, whose importance declined by the end of 50s and got back to favour after the affirmation of neurosciences. Pattern drill actually consist of stimulus-response-confirmation sequences presented in rapid succession, so that learners do not have enough time to develop a conscious reflection but are spurred to activate a spontaneous memorisation. In SL teaching practice this has been shaped into two different models of drills, the syntagmatic drills and the paradigmatic drills<sup>141</sup>. The formers were conceived to push learners to modify syntagmatic units in SL, they soon appeared quite adequate for students’ training on short morphological operations in SL, as the mechanisation of processes like conjugations and inflections (I work: I worked; On parle: on parlait; a chair: some chairs). As it may be noticed, this specific training works well in cases where SL is an inflected language, does not have the same impact on synthetic languages. The second model, paradigmatic, was instead designed to memorise word combinations, like verb-object or adverb-verb (see + the doctor; drink + water; run + fast) and mechanise minimum compounds. The paradigmatic drills were definitely more applicable to CFL teaching practice, with particular regard to vocabulary acquisition and small talk practice strategies, on one hand because they could adapt more easily to Chinese morphological structure, for instance in 离合词 *líhécí* compounds like 吃饭 (*chī+fàn* eat+rice) or 唱歌 (*chàng+gē* sing+song) or in occurrent combinations like 做作业 (*zuò zuòyè* do+homework) 写作业 (*xiě zuòyè* write+homework). On the other hand, because they were supported by CFL instructors in China who had traditionally been trained to teach the ‘fixed combinations’ (固定搭配词组 *gùdìng dāpèi cízǔ*, like 为...而 *wèi..ér* or V+来 V+去 V+来 V+去). Pattern drills were naturally projected to be done in language laboratory and continued to be the fundamentals of audio-lingual approach, audiovisual

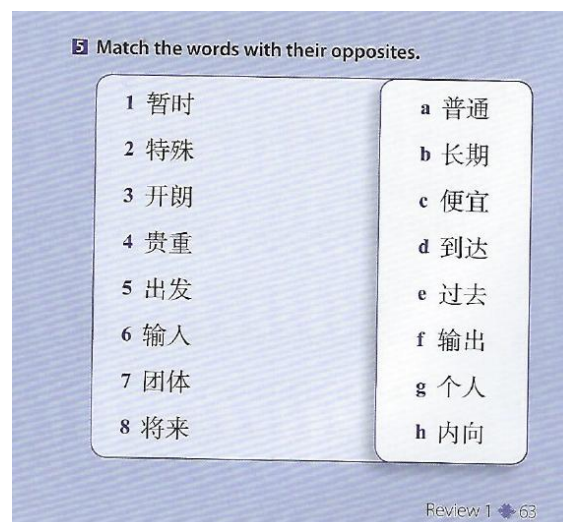
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<sup>141</sup> Balboni, 2016, p. 29

approach and méthodologie structuro-globale audiovisuelle (sgav)<sup>142</sup> which developed in French-speaking world until late 70s. Despite the fact that now structuralism is perceived as an old-fashioned methodology, rather inadequate to respond to SL learning needs, pattern drills still remain a consistent component of SL textbooks and daily teaching practice. The reason probably hides behind the experience of teachers and compilers who insist on the belief that automatizing a process is the key for learning success. As a good worker automatizes the sequences of a process to optimize his global performance, in the same way a learner needs to automatize some processes by means of repetition to learn a language. From the figures below, we can observe the persistence of pattern drills and other structuralistic perspectives in numerous CFL textbooks published and currently adopted both in Asia and in the West<sup>143</sup>.

**Figure 2**

***“Discover China 4 – Student’s book”***



*Source: Discover China 4 – Student’s book, 2014, p. 63*

<sup>142</sup> Mihaela, 2006, p. 19

<sup>143</sup> Some examples are Discover China (Macmillan, 2014), New Practical Chinese Reader II ed (BLCU press, 2012), Cinese contemporaneo (Sinolingua, 2009), Il cinese per gli Italiani (Hoepli, 2010), Parliamo cinese (Hoepli, 2018).

Figure 3

*“New Practical Chinese Reader”*

1. 熟读下列词组 Read the following phrases until you learn them by heart

- (1) 看得懂 听得懂 看得见 听得清楚 记得住 做得完 想得到  
看不懂 听不懂 看不见 听不清楚 记不住 做不完 想不到  
买得到 唱得好 学得会 照得上  
买不到 唱不好 学不会 照不上
- (2) 上得去 下得来 进得去 出得来 回得去 回得来 过得去 过得来  
上不去 下不来 进不去 出不来 回不去 回不来 过不去 过不来
- (3) 搬得出来 爬得上来 跳得过来 骑得回去 踢得进去 拿得上来  
开得进去 走不下去 游得过去 跑不回来 踢不进去 拿不上去
- (4) 想出来 写出来 看出来 听出来 回答出来  
想得出来 写得出来 看得出来 听得出来 回答得出来

Source: *New Practical Chinese Reader*, 2012, p. 134

Figure 4

*“Il Cinese per gli Italiani – corso base”*

② 替换练习 Sostituisci la parte sottolineata delle frasi con le locuzioni date

(1) 你们有中文书吗?

中国电影  
中文电影  
美国音乐  
《意汉词典》

(2) 小雨有没有《意汉词典》?

保罗的电话  
意大利朋友  
中国同学

(3) 马可和安娜在教室吗?

家  
大学  
保罗那儿  
王老师家

(4) 路易在不在图书馆?

法国  
北京  
他们班  
米兰大学

Source: *Il Cinese per gli Italiani – corso base*, 2010, p. 106

Figure 5

: “*Cinese contemporaneo* – 当代中文, Libro degli esercizi”

1. Leggi le seguenti parole e frasi:

已经来了 已经到了 已经知道了 已经放假了 已经休息了  
还在学习 还想买一点儿 还没到 还没工作 还不知道  
很可能 不可能 有可能 可能知道 可能不去 不可能去  
睡睡觉 睡过觉 睡了一觉 睡个好觉  
说完 吃完 喝完 学完 看完 做完 用完 卖完  
错了 说错了 写错了 做错了 走错了  
肚子疼 上厕所 去医院看病 看医生

2. Esercizi di sostituzione:

(1) 他现在不在家, 他去医院了。

朋友家 商店
公司 学校

(2) A: 大家都来了没有?

B: 王英没来, 别的同学都来了。

到 去
写 看

Source: *Il Cinese contemporaneo* – 当代中文 Libro degli esercizi, 2009, p. 67

From a formal perspective, however, the glory of structuralism in SL education habits was abruptly interrupted in the late 50s by the violent attack Chomsky conducted against the behaviourism, in particular against Skinner's theories about stimulus and response. Following up to this, Lado himself, one of the founding fathers of behaviourism, pushed the boundaries of his initial theories in the light of the evidence brought out by sociolinguistic studies. He began to support the belief that small language<sup>144</sup> structures (which actually stood for the base of pattern drill concept) should not lead an independent life in language education as they risk to lose their meaning if disconnected from a social situation. In other

<sup>144</sup> 'language' here primarily refers to morphology

words, language drills would only gain effectiveness in SL learning process if connected to a context in which actual communication takes place. This conclusion definitely wiped off structuralism and paved the way for the upsurge of situational method, the first (almost unconscious) realisation of communicative approach.

#### **5.4 Communicative approach**

By definition, the origin of communicative approach theory was initiated the publication of “How to Do Things with Words” (Austin, 1962) and culminated in “Speech Acts” (Searle, 1969). This moment marked a turning point in what a language (especially a foreign language) consisted of, in what a language represented and implied for a learner/speaker. SL teaching theorists and practitioners shifted from focusing on language structure (how is the language made?) to giving huge importance to language application (what does/can the language do?). The formal and structural way in which language had been conceived and analysed for centuries moved to a more practical and social dimension, this is essentially the theoretical basis of pragmalinguistics. It is in fact in the 70s that theorists, textbook compilers, course designers, teachers and instructors dropped the interest in language forms (to be, to have) and began to classify second languages into practical goals (telling the time, likes and dislikes) attainable through appropriate and specific application. These goals, soon after named ‘communicative functions’ in SL pedagogy, peeped out in British language policy and pervaded continental Europe in few years; Austin’s and Searle’s works served as a reference for Trim, Wilkins, Van Ek and others to construct a “global” repertory of communicative functions common to (almost) any language. In the indexes shown in the figures below, we can observe the tangible manifestation of this tendency. In fact, in numerous CFL textbooks published after the early



90s, compilers have dissected the target language into functions/goals and designed learning units in terms of communicative competence.

**Figure 6**

**“Discover China 4 – Student’s book”**

Title	Unit Topic	Listening and Reading	Speaking and Writing
Unit 1 你一定行! You can do it! page 15	Jobs and internships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding feelings and concerns</li> <li>Understanding job advertisements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking for information</li> <li>Giving encouragement</li> <li>Writing an email asking for more information about a position</li> </ul>
Unit 2 你感觉怎么样? How did you feel? page 27	CVs and job interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding key information about a job interview</li> <li>Understanding difficulties living abroad</li> <li>Understanding an application letter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking for and giving opinions about a job interview</li> <li>Talking about difficulties living abroad</li> <li>Writing an application letter</li> </ul>
Unit 3 让您的旅行没有后顾之忧! We can help you plan a worry-free trip!	Planning a trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying key information in detailed explanations</li> <li>Understanding requests and giving responses</li> <li>Understanding an itinerary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking for and giving clarification about a trip</li> <li>Writing a simple itinerary</li> </ul>

Source: Discover China 4-Student’s book, 2014, p. 6

**Figure 7**

**“New Practical Chinese Reader”**

**汽车我先开着**  
Let me drive the car first. 165

课文 Text  
练习 Exercises  
练习与运用 Drills and Practice

1. 责备与质问  
Reproaching and questioning

2. 拒绝 Refusing

3. 解释 Making an explanation

语法 Grammar

1. 疑问代词表示任指(1)  
Interrogative pronouns indicating arbitrary reference (1)

2. 分数、百分数、倍数  
Fractions, percentages and multiples

3. ……也/都+没/不……  
The construction “……也/都+没/不……”

4. 就是……, 也……  
The construction “就是……, 也……”

四、字与词  
Chinese Characters and Words  
构词法(9): 附加式③  
Word formation method (9): Affixed compound words ③

文化知识 Cultural Note  
Consumption of Chinese People

Source: *New Practical Chinese Reader*, 2012, p. V

Figure 8

**“Parla e scrivi in cinese”**

Unità 0 - Introduzione. La lingua cinese p. 2					
生词 Shēngcí		语法 Yǔfǎ		语音 Yǔyīn	写汉字 Xiě Hànzì
Unità 1					
<b>Lezione 1</b> 你好! Nǐ hǎo! p. 6	Le principali formule di saluto p. 7	Il suffisso del plurale 们 <i>mén</i> p. 8 Le frasi interrogative con la particella 吗 <i>mǎ</i> p. 8	Il sistema di trascrizione <i>pinyin</i> p. 8 La sillaba p. 9 Come pronunciare le sillabe cinesi (I) p. 9 Il tono p. 10	I caratteri p. 11	
	课堂活动 Kètáng huódòng p. 12		练习本 Liànxíběn p. E2		
<b>Lezione 2</b> 我叫林木兰。 Wǒ jiào Lín Mùlán. p. 14	La struttura del nome cinese p. 15	La struttura di base della frase p. 16 Il verbo 是 <i>shì</i> p. 16 Le frasi interrogative con sostituto p. 16 ■ La frase interrogativa con il sostituto 谁 <i>shéi/shuí</i> p. 16 ■ La frase interrogativa con il sostituto 什么 <i>shénme</i> p. 16	Come pronunciare le sillabe cinesi (II) p. 17 Le sillabe a iniziale zero p. 18	I tratti (I) p. 19	
	课堂活动 Kètáng huódòng p. 20		练习本 Liànxíběn p. E4		

Source: *Parla e scrivi in cinese*, 2016, p. VI

The first debate around competence in language education was raised by Chomsky in 1965, who differentiated between “competence (the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language) and “performance” (the actual use of language in concrete situations). He believed that any deviation from the ideal in actual performance does not reflect competence, any error in production can relate with one or more elements, including competence, that affect performance. A further, more comprehensive and today definitely more accepted notion of communicative competence is the one given by Hymes in 1972. He felt that Chomsky definition «omit(ted) almost everything of socio-cultural significance<sup>145</sup>», he believed that achieving grammar correctness was not enough to be communicative

<sup>145</sup> Hymes, 1972, p. 285

competent. He insisted on the fact that «the goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behaviour<sup>146</sup>». According to Hymes, four are the lenses necessary to identify a real communicative competence: possibility (whether a locution is grammatically possible), feasibility (whether the interlocutors can make use of the locution, due to psycholinguistic factors such as memory limitations), appropriateness (whether the locution meets the cultural expectations for the desired interaction in that context) and occurrence (whether the locution is made or not)<sup>147</sup>. The notion of competence introduced a new way to design teaching behaviour and expect learning goals in language education across Europe, and also represented a milestone in language standardization process. In fact, one of the major operations the Council of Europe did soon after competence got defined was to set homogeneous levels of communicative competence able to relate proficiency standards and assessment criteria in various languages. The threshold level is probably the most famous competence level born in 1975 and renamed B1 in the 90s after the establishment of CEFR levels (See section 1.6). According to the global scale descriptors of CEFR competence levels, B1 speakers are qualified as “independent users” who «Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans<sup>148</sup>». Over the last 40 years competence levels increased in number, besides, Council of Europe has

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<sup>146</sup> Hymes, 1972, p. 286

<sup>147</sup> Tarvin, 2015, p. 4

<sup>148</sup> [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int) (12/09/2020)

developed some assessment criteria that have contributed to outline more clearly and comprehensively the entity of each competence in the scale. An example may be drawn from the integrative description shown in the chart focusing on qualitative aspects of spoken language use at B1 level: « (B1 user) Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circum-locutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events. Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations. Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production. Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding. Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points<sup>149</sup> ».

The definition and the application of the notion of competence has brought three distinct (but related) consequences in language education practice. Firstly, being a new method to classify language use and detect performance in scientific way, competence has partially reduced a series of discrepancies traditionally existing among languages. One for all may be represented by the language certification systems. Regardless from the tested language (French, English, Chinese) and the certifying institution (Institut Français, Cambridge University, Hanban), any certification format (DELF-DALF, KET/PET/FCE/CAE, HSK1/2/3/4/5/6) is designed around the concept of competence and programmed to test a wide scale of levels, each one of them comprising a series of “can” statements the candidate has to prove to the examiner. Despite the ideal alignment among languages

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<sup>149</sup> [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int) (12/09/2020)

depicted above, the debate around the equivalency between CEFR levels (currently considered the standard descriptors of language competence worldwide) and competence levels promoted by certifying systems not connected to Council of Europe (Hanban for instance) is still open and is not supposed to come to a conclusion soon. The second consequence refers to the mere teaching practice. Since the notion of competence started to trace the boundaries of communicative approach, teaching activity has aimed at making learners attain a certain level in SL by the end of a session, year or time unit. This has radically changed the way to programme and carry out teaching activity. Course syllabi originally declined in contents were converted into tables of competences and/or learning objectives, as visible in figures below, consequently teachers and course programmers started to reconsider educational actions in terms of learning outcomes, distinguishing among knowledge, skills and competences.

**Figure 9**

“Ni shuo ya”

**5 我的房间** p. 81-98

**1 房间里有...**  
La chambre et son ameublement

**2 我的东西**  
Les couleurs et les objets préférés de la chambre

**3 在房间里**  
Ce que l'on fait dans sa chambre

**CARACTÈRES**

里	新	第	每	白	左
右	如	果	用	机	让
开	觉	得	手	狗	同
玩	它	那	狗	跟	意
红	听	话	跟	能	旧
只	知	道	常	爸	

**GRAMMAIRE**

里面有, 是白色的, 在, 如果  
.....会, 为什么? 因为, 所以  
一边.....一边....., 一起

**CIVILISATION ET VIDÉOS**

La maison et le mobilier

Source: Ni shuo ya, 2016, p. III

**Figure 10**

**“Ni shuo ba”**



*Source: Ni shuo ba, 2013, p. 55*

According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (23/04/2008) on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, learning outcomes are defined as «statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.» In particular, the same Recommendation intended to draw a separation line among the three notions, defining them as follows:

«“knowledge” means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts,

principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study; “skills” means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive or practical; “competence” means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.<sup>150</sup>»

Despite the definition reported above has clearly differentiated the theoretical entities among knowledge, skill and competence, the direct observation of classroom dynamics we have done in Italian and French CFL classes has revealed that many teachers probably familiar with a structural approach still struggle to distinguish them or are not inclined to it. We assume this tendency may be partially attributed to the approach they were used to as students, and partially attributed to the format of current textbooks where pattern drills and structural exercises still dominate most of the learning units. In addition to this, when projecting class activities through the lens of competences, many teachers have reported to take into high consideration the socio-linguistic gap between students’ NL<sup>151</sup> and CFL in learning process. In other words, the relevance of the long debated notion of typological distance<sup>152</sup> between NL and SL seems a serious concern in learning environments, especially in Italy. According to a brief survey conducted among CFL teachers in secondary schools located in Emilia Romagna and Lombardy, numerous experienced teachers have reported that linguistic distance tends to slow down learning process and forces teaching pace to indulge on frequent digressions. In support to this, they claimed Chinese language learners need longer time than English or

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<sup>150</sup> [www.eurspace.eu](http://www.eurspace.eu) (15/09/2020)

<sup>151</sup> mostly French and Italian

<sup>152</sup> Nishikawa & Van, 2016; Zhang, 2012

French learners to automatize basic language processes and internalise graphic and speaking abilities. This makes students use up more energy than expected and lose motivation in study, especially if comparing the learning goals achieved in Chinese with the ones in Spanish or French, languages where B1 level can be attained after a relatively light study load. The third consequence revolving around the notion of competence and probably more interesting for our research, is the way communicative approach has been translated into teaching methods. In particular, two of them became driving forces in worldwide language education: the situational method and the Learning-by-Doing method.



## CHAPTER 6. Methods and Materials

### 6.1 Communication-oriented methods

First raised in mid 60s in the wake of Lado's revolutionary ideas and the increasing role of pragmalinguistics<sup>153</sup> in educational theories, during the 90s the situational method has definitely taken over in British language education and has gradually spread from EFL area to the second languages in general, including Chinese. In most of CFL book series for both universities and high schools published in the west, situational method has been affected by other influential approaches, with the result that compilers have often designed textbook structure (learning unit layout, quantity and typology of exercises, presence/absence of audio-visual tracks, self-assessment sections) through a sort of "hybridised" method. It is usual, in fact, to see various elements drawn from structuralism (pattern drills in exercise sections) retained and put in great evidence, but complemented by situations and contexts that bind language theory (how is the language made?) to language application (what does/can the language do?). As visible in the examples shown below, language situations are outlined on the basis of coordinates that have become sort of universal in all SL textbooks of this genre: time and space (at the mall, at the train station, on holiday), the role of participants (doctor, friends) and their "language" purpose (to reserve a table, to book a ticket).

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<sup>153</sup> Balboni, 2016, p. 37

Figure 11

“Ni shuo ba”

LEÇON	PARCOURS D'ACTIVITÉS	THÉMATIQUE
5 生活艺术	1 休闲和假期 pp. 76-77	Les loisirs et les vacances des Chinois : interviews, textes et photos
	2 饮食习惯 pp. 78-79	Les habitudes culinaires des Chinois et la cuisine chinoise à travers des récits et des conseils
	3 中医 pp. 80-81	La médecine traditionnelle chinoise et ses applications au quotidien
	4 名医 pp. 82-83	L'histoire de la pharmacopée en images à travers la vie de deux illustres personnages
6 艺术中国	1 音乐 pp. 90-91	La musique traditionnelle et les courants musicaux actuels vus par la jeunesse
	2 时尚与时代 pp. 92-93	L'évolution de la mode de l'empire à aujourd'hui, témoignages et documents
	3 美术 pp. 94-95	La peinture ancienne face à l'art moderne : récits, témoignages et images
	4 电影 pp. 96-97	Le cinéma chinois d'aujourd'hui : quelques exemples de films, de cinéastes et de genres
Méthodologie	Écrire	p. 103
Synthèse de documents	Nutrition et santé	p. 104-105
Nouvelle	Art et politique	p. 106-107
Projet	Épisode 3	p. 108-109
	Rédiger une histoire	p. 110

Source: Ni shuo ba, 2013, p. 5

Figure 12

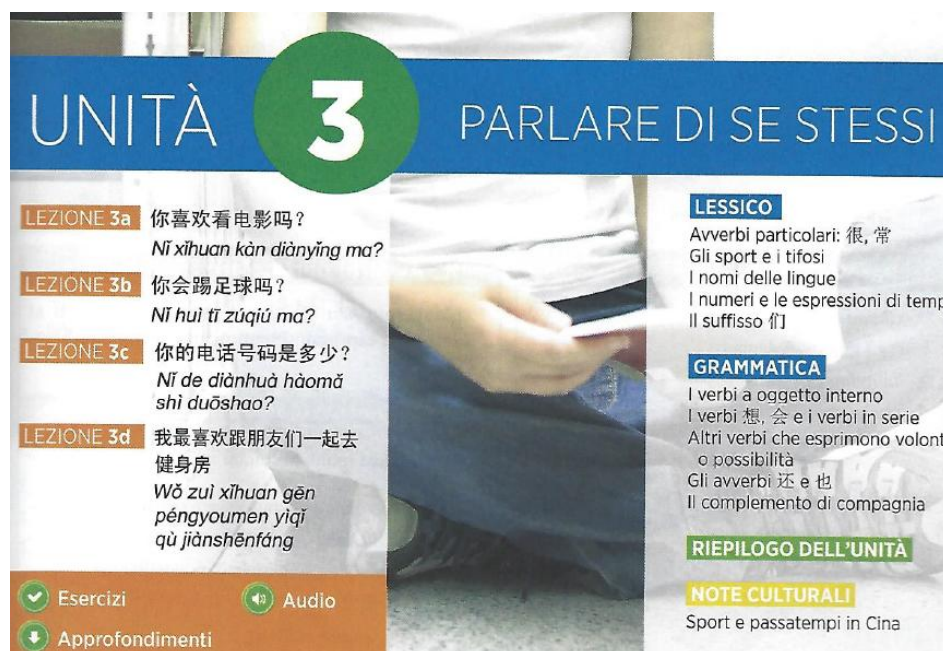
“Parliamo cinese 1”

UNITÀ 1 SALUTI E PRESENTAZIONI	
1a Salutare	Chiedere come stai
Rispondere	1b Presentarsi
Chiedere l'identità di qualcuno	Espressioni di cortesia
1c Chiedere/Dirè il nome e il cognome	Chiedere/Dirè l'età
1d Parlare della famiglia	
<b>LEZIONE 1a</b> 你好	<b>LESSICO</b>
Nǐ hǎo ..... 2	Come si scrive il cinese
<b>LEZIONE 1b</b> 我是小云	Come si chiamano i cinesi
Wǒ shì Xiǎoyún ..... 4	I numeri
<b>LEZIONE 1c</b> 你叫什么名字?	Un testo cinese
Nǐ jiào shénme míngzi? ..... 6	<b>I SUONI DEL CINESE</b>
<b>LEZIONE 1d</b> 他们是谁?	<b>GRAMMATICA</b>
Tāmen shì shéi? ..... 8	Frase affermativa
<b>RIEPILOGO DELL'UNITÀ</b> ..... 10	Frase interrogativa
<b>NOTE CULTURALI</b>	Soggetto, predicato, oggetto
I caratteri cinesi ..... 12	I pronomi interrogativi
	La particella de
	<b>LA SCRITTURA</b>
	<b>ESERCIZI</b>
	Lezione 1a ..... 86
	Lezione 1b ..... 88
	Lezione 1c ..... 91
	Lezione 1d ..... 93
	<b>Area digitale</b>
	✓ Esercizi
	🔊 Audio
	📖 Approfondimenti

Source: Parliamo cinese 1, 2018, p. VIII

Figure 13

“Parliamo cinese 1”



Source: *Parliamo cinese 1*, 2018, p. 25

According to the research conducted on CFL textbooks currently used in secondary schools, we have noticed a slight divergence between the way French and Italian compilers translated communicative approach into practice and the way they integrated situational method with other inputs in terms of structure and layout. In particular, we have observed that in French textbooks, like the series “Ni shuo ne<sup>154</sup>”, “Ni shuo ya<sup>155</sup>” and “Ni shuo ba<sup>156</sup>”, the elements attributable to situational method and, more generally, designed for communicative purpose are numerically many more and qualitatively more relevant than structural elements. A distinctive feature we can see in both Italian and French textbooks is the synergy between a progression in language level and the presentation of socio-linguistic situations in rapid succession. This technique is conceived to move learners across a number of real-life sceneries on one side, and

<sup>154</sup> Arslangul (2009)

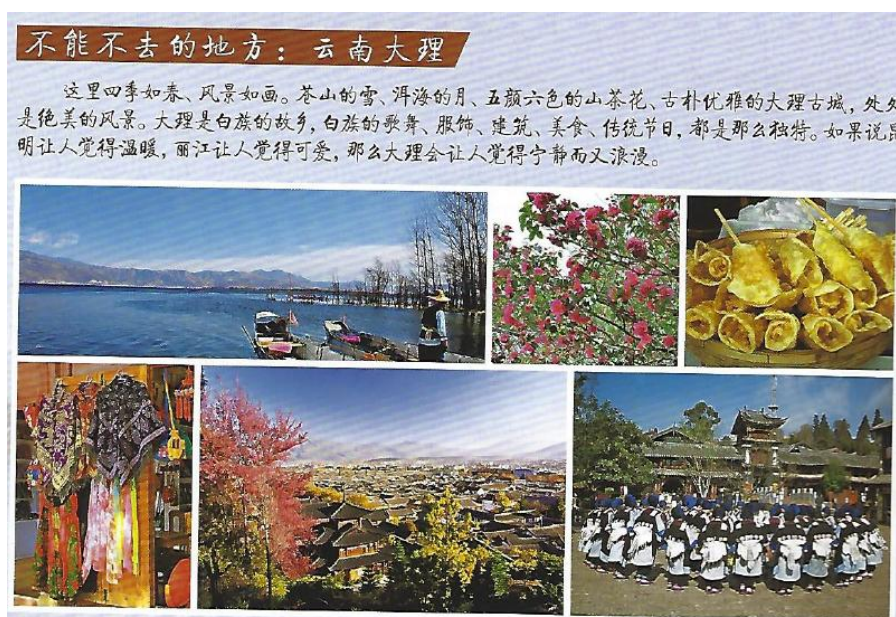
<sup>155</sup> Arslangul (2016)

<sup>156</sup> Arslangul (2013)

promote vocabulary expansion and structural progression on the other. Situational method acknowledges the importance of audio tracks, developed from the recorded dialogues broadly used in the 80s. From learners' perspective, audio elements as a real source of authenticity binding language and context: they contribute to plunge learners into a realistic atmosphere by means of real-like verbal exchanges, background sounds, accents, tones and timbres. Besides this, audio tracks are usually accompanied by a script or refer to a written text, which can be used as vocabulary bank to be consulted at a later time or, in case of dialogues, used as hints for open discussion and role-play activities. Another data emerging from observation is that Arslangul's series presents numerous pictures, charts, tables, colourful headings and other paratextual. We assume their presence can be related to two reasons, on one side paratext makes the product gain appeal on the market, on the other, images catalyse motivation around an authentic situation and synchronise learners' eyes and emotions with the context presented.

**Figure 14**

***“Discover China 4 – Student’s book”***



*Source: Discover China 4 – Student’s book, 2014, p. 113*

Figure 15

“Studiamo il cinese!”

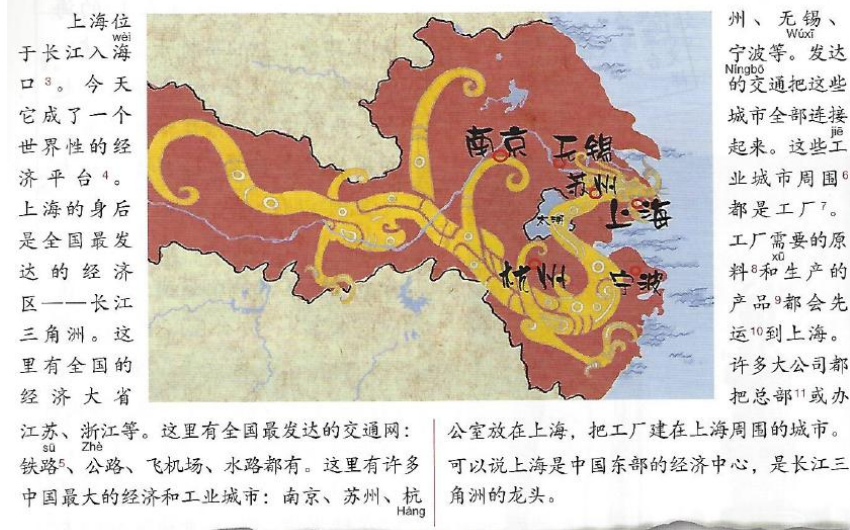


Source: *Studiamo il cinese!*, 2019, p. 18

Figure 16

“Ni shuo ba”

上海是长江三角洲<sup>1</sup>的龙<sup>2</sup>头



Source: *Ni shuo ba*, 2013, p. 62

Figure 17

“Ni shuo ya”



Source: *Ni shuo ya*, 2016, p. 91

Figure 18

“Studiamo il cinese!”

怎么说呢? Come si dice?

1.194 Osserva, ascolta e ripeti.

<p>1</p> <p>中国很大。 日本很小。</p>	<p>2</p> <p>我的猫很胖。 他的猫很瘦。</p>	<p>3</p> <p>男朋友很高。 女朋友很矮。</p>
<p>4</p> <p>这个同学很好。 那些同学很坏。</p>	<p>5</p> <p>这本书很好看。 这本书很难看。</p>	<p>6</p> <p>这支笔很短。 那支笔很长。</p>

Source: *Studiamo il cinese!*, 2019, p. 167

Figure 19



Source: *Parliamo cinese 1*, 2018, p. 47

Although sharing a large number of aspects related to communicative approach, Italian compilers tend to integrate them with the elements borrowed from formalistic and structural tradition. In detail, the two series “*Il cinese per gli Italiani*<sup>157</sup>” and “*Parliamo cinese*<sup>158</sup>” compiled by a group of authors directed by La Sapienza University, include three components evidently related to other approaches (see figures below). The first trait, borrowed from structuralism, is the abundant presence of pattern drills aimed at developing listening skills and morpho-syntactic awareness (inclusion/exclusion, multiple choice, ordering, minimal pairs). The second trait deviating from communicative approach is the presence of dense grammar sections, a legacy of formalism, where learners can find rules, examples and explanations with a corresponding section of exercises. Another distinctive feature borrowed from formalism is the translation

<sup>157</sup> “*Il cinese per gli Italiani – corso base*” (2010); “*Il cinese per gli Italiani – corso intermedio*” (2010)

<sup>158</sup> “*Parliamo cinese 1*” (2016, 2018); “*Parliamo cinese 2*” (2017); “*Parliamo cinese 3*” (2020)

from and to Chinese. The value of this practice, despite being questioned by authentic task supporters, seems to be taken in high consideration by Italian language teachers and emerges as an imperative component in most textbooks. The third trait we remarked as being deviating from communicative approach and partially referable to the “reading method<sup>159</sup>” is the presence of sections of reading comprehension about culture and civilisation, which are usually placed at the end of learning units with a short related task.

**Figure 20**

**“Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base”**

四、语法 Yǔfǎ → Grammatica

Le **espressioni di tempo** si trovano di regola al principio della frase cinese e sono impiegate per indicare il tempo in cui si svolge l'azione espressa del verbo. Il tempo determinato si esprime come in italiano: procedendo dalle unità maggiori a quelle minori; l'indicazione dell'ora precede sempre quella dei minuti; inoltre ciascuna indicazione numerica è seguita dal classificatore opportuno: *liǎng diǎn yí kè* 两点一刻 'due e un quarto'. Distingui però *sān diǎn bàn* 三点半 'tre e mezza', in cui il classificatore *diǎn* 点 indica la 'ora' del tempo assoluto, dall'espressione *yí gè bàn xiǎoshí* 一个半小时 'un'ora e mezza' in cui il *gè* 个 è impiegato come classificatore delle 'ore' *xiǎoshí* 小时 che esprimono durata; dieci minuti si dirà *shí fēn zhōng* 十分钟 e un quarto d'ora *yí kè zhōng* 一刻钟.

La forma negativa delle frasi che indicano il tempo si realizza con *búshì* 不是: *fēijī búshì bā diǎn dào* 飞机不是八点到。

lunedì	martedì	mercoledì	giovedì	venerdì	sabato	domenica
星期一 <i>xīngqīyī</i> 周一 <i>zhōuyī</i>	星期二 <i>xīngqīèr</i> 周二 <i>zhōuèr</i>	星期三 <i>xīngqīsān</i> 周三 <i>zhōusān</i>	星期四 <i>xīngqīsì</i> 周四 <i>zhōusì</i>	星期五 <i>xīngqīwǔ</i> 周五 <i>zhōuwǔ</i>	星期六 <i>xīngqīliù</i> 周六 <i>zhōuliù</i>	星期天 <i>xīngqītiān</i> 星期日 <i>xīngqīrì</i> 周日 <i>zhōurì</i>

gennaio	febbraio	marzo	aprile	maggio	giugno
一月 <i>yīyuè</i>	二月 <i>èryuè</i>	三月 <i>sānyuè</i>	四月 <i>sìyuè</i>	五月 <i>wūyuè</i>	六月 <i>liùyuè</i>
luglio	agosto	settembre	ottobre	novembre	dicembre
七月 <i>qīyuè</i>	八月 <i>bāyuè</i>	九月 <i>jiǔyuè</i>	十月 <i>shíyuè</i>	十一月 <i>shíyīyuè</i>	十二月 <i>shíèryuè</i>

Source: *Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base*, 2010, p. 193

<sup>159</sup> Method appeared between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, based on autonomous reading of cultural texts. (Balboni, 2016, p. 25)



Figure 21

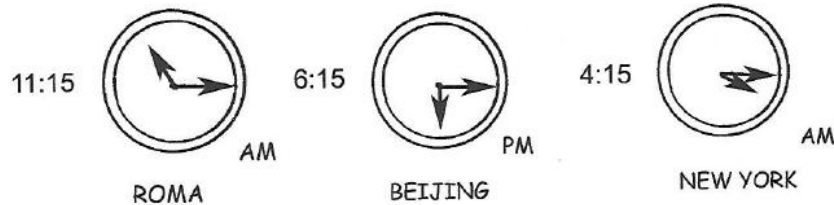
“Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base”

(二) 语法练习 Grammatica

① 看课程表，说一说什么时间上什么课 Leggi gli orari delle lezioni

上午	星期一	星期二	星期三	星期四	星期五
8:30—10:00	汉语口语	/	汉语口语	古汉语(gǔhànyǔ, cinese classico)	汉语口语
10:00—11:30	中国文学	汉语听力 (tīnglǐ, ascolto)	/	中国文学	/
12:15—13:45	英语	意大利文学	汉语语法	/	汉语语法
下午					
15:00—16:00	中国历史 (lìshǐ, storia)		中国艺术 (yìshù, arte)	汉语听力	中国哲学 (zhéxué, filosofia)

② 看图，说话 Guarda le figure e componi delle frasi



Source: *Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base*, 2010, p. 197

Figure 22

“Parliamo cinese 1”

语法 Grammatica

- Anche l'ora in cinese si esprime con una frase a predicato nominale.
  - ▶ Xiàzài bā diǎn bàn le. 现在八点半了。 Sono le otto e mezza.
- L'uso di diǎn 点 dopo i numeri è obbligatorio; fēn 分 può essere omesso. Anche in questo caso, la forma negativa si realizza con bú shì 不是.
  - ▶ Xiàzài bú shì bā diǎn bàn. 现在不是八点半。 Non sono le otto e mezza.

词汇和理解 Lessico e comprensione

3. Collega le espressioni che indicano lo stesso orario nelle due colonne e poi disegna le lancette.

1. 三点半                      a. 七点五十五分



2. 差五分八点                b. 差一刻六点



3. 五点三刻                    c. 三点三十分





Source: *Parliamo cinese 1*, 2018, p. 55


Figure 23

**“Parliamo cinese 1”**

12. 描述时间, 并根据图片造句。  
Scrivi che ore sono e costruisci le frasi con le foto date.

1.   
\_\_\_\_\_

2.   
\_\_\_\_\_

3.   
\_\_\_\_\_

Source: *Parliamo cinese 1*, 2018, p. 131

Obviously, any textbook designed under a communicative approach (regardless from being hybridised or not) needs to be supported and interpreted by a coherent teaching action. Gloria Gabbianelli in her contribution to “La didattica del cinese nella scuola secondaria di secondo grado. Esperienze e prospettive” (Brezzi & Lioi, 2018) claims that teaching activity oriented to communicative purpose should go through a sequence of phases developed for Italian SL classes<sup>160</sup> that reproduce the cognitive processes of natural acquisition:

«A questo fine il percorso didattico si sviluppa secondo un’organizzazione modulare che “si articola in ‘unità didattica’ e ‘unità di apprendimento’ (UA)”. L’UA si dispiega in momenti ben definiti costituiti nell’ordine da: motivazione, globalità, analisi, sintesi e riflessione. Tale sequenza ricalca i processi

<sup>160</sup> Troiano, 2019, p. 21

cognitivi di acquisizione naturale. Secondo tale organizzazione sequenziale, infatti, si promuove una comprensione prima globale del testo attraverso differenti attività che guidano lo studente, in maniera graduale, verso una comprensione sempre più dettagliata dello stesso. Gli aspetti formali sono sempre presenti all'interno del contesto dove trovano forma come atti comunicativi, successivamente la fase di analisi ne chiarisce la struttura, definendone le regole grammaticali e lessicali e, infine, alla fase definita di sintesi è destinato il compito creativo dello studente. Il momento della sintesi prevede il reimpiego in contesti differenti delle nozioni linguistiche introdotte nel corso della UA.» (Gabbianelli, 2018, p. 79)

In the same contribution, Gabbianelli describes a number of techniques aimed at developing communicative acts in learners. It is interesting to notice that some of them make explicit reference to “Parliamo cinese 1” :

«Le attività per la produzione e l'interazione orale mirano a promuovere autonomia e creatività: lo studente è stimolato a reimpiegare, in modalità indipendente e il più possibile creativa, le forme linguistiche e le funzioni comunicative proposte nel corso della UA; [...] Una di queste attività è rappresentata dalla compilazione di griglie. Alcune domande o enunciati compaiono in LS<sup>161</sup>, lo studente deve prima interpretarli e poi adoperarli per ricercare i dati che gli occorrono al fine di completare la sua griglia ed esporre le sue richieste ai compagni. [...] Questo tipo di attività è particolarmente adatta ai livelli più bassi. Altre attività molto efficaci per gli obiettivi descritti sono gli esercizi di drammatizzazione. Nel *role making*, ad esempio, il più strutturato

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<sup>161</sup> The Italian acronym for SL

tra le attività di ruolo, lo studente è guidato passo dopo passo nelle attività d'interazione orale da indicazioni precise [...]. Il *role playing* prevede invece una maggiore autonomia creativa, l'esercizio indica il contesto e i compiti da realizzare che lo studente può gestire in maniera libera. [...] La pratica comunicativa, notoriamente collocata nella fase di sintesi della UA, sembra essere particolarmente rilevante per gli studenti di cinese in Italia; in primo luogo dà loro occasione di testare l'atto linguistico nel contesto situazionale della LS ricreato dall'insegnante, la contestualizzazione di aspetti socio-culturali attraverso attività didattiche è inoltre un ottimo ausilio per ridurre la percezione di distanza degli studenti. [...] incoraggiare la pratica del maggior numero di attività comunicative ci sembra possa costituire la base di un percorso di successo dell'apprendimento del cinese come lingua straniera.» (Gabbianelli, 2018, p. 81-84)

As already remarked in our analysis, the adoption of specific techniques designed to stimulate communicative acts should rely on appropriate socio-linguistic situations programmed by the teacher and/or presented in the coursebook. Starting from this evidence, some fringes of pragmalinguists pushed the boundaries of communicative approach further than ever before. Their assumption was that any competence could be acquired only under two conditions. The first condition was inspired by the theories on authentic task learning method<sup>162</sup>, it postulates that learning process has to take place in the framework of an authentic dimension where students have the opportunity to be involved in a real (or extremely realistic) task. The second condition, exquisitely related to the Learning-by-Doing

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<sup>162</sup> Oura, 2001, p. 67

method<sup>163</sup>, assumes that learners need to tackle the task in a practical way, get an active role toward learning, by ‘doing’ something rather than ‘knowing’ or ‘studying’ something. These two pedagogical methods, though based on clearly distinct theoretical assumptions, began to see their features diluted, up to the point of blending one with the other in teaching practice. They actually gained particular importance in Italy and France around mid-90s, where found in primary education a fertile field of application<sup>164</sup>. They seemed particularly productive in subjects related to sciences and technology, where the distance between theory and application was way shorter than in any other subjects. Seen the encouraging outcomes produced on children<sup>165</sup>, the two methods have gradually affected secondary and higher education (sometimes with less encouraging results though), having extended their application field to disciplines other than mathematics or natural sciences, like history and foreign languages. Learning-by-Doing method inherited the primacy of ‘doing’ from the evidence of pragmalinguistic studies and absorbed the strong influence of situational learning. It pushed students to “act” with the language, use the language to carry out ordinary or less ordinary tasks that can occur in daily life, like making a phonecall, write down one’s CV, ordering something, dealing with objections from clients and so on. In this view, classroom loses its traditional guise of fictitious environment, and turns into a “workshop of reality”, a place where students are challenged with situations they have already experienced or are likely to happen in a future working life. The range of possible tasks varies from writing an enquiry via email in Chinese to conducting a job interview with a native speaker or being a guide for a Chinese delegation just arrived in town. Below we report two

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<sup>163</sup> defined “*méthode actionnelle*” in French

<sup>164</sup> Bot, 2007, p. 115

<sup>165</sup> Haefner & Zembal-Saul, 2004, p. 1658

examples of authentic tasks submitted in one of the secondary schools surveyed in Italy. The first example is drawn from unofficial teaching materials edited by a teacher and addressed to 4<sup>th</sup> grade students from a high school in Ferrara (Italy), it has students write a response to a job advertisement. The second example is drawn from a formal source, one of the student's books from the series "Discover China", which has been addressed to the same class and used to integrate the previous material in the same teaching unit.

**Figure 24**

*Unofficial teaching material (authentic task exercise)*

练习：轮到你写信了

1. 你要向王老师询问一下他能不能推迟考试的日期。
2. 你在一家高中的网站看到了求职启事，他们在寻找一位汉语老师，写一封应聘信。
3. 校长和老师给了你奖学金，为此给他们写感谢信。

Source: Teaching material drawn from "G. Carducci" high school, Italy

**Figure 25**

*"Discover China 4 – Student's book"*

**Communication activity**

Choose a job ad below. Apply by revising your résumé in Activity 8, Lesson 2 accordingly.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>招聘</b></p> <p>职位：暑期小学英文老师2名          工作地点：XX小学          工作时间：七月初至八月底，周一至周五上午8点到下午3点          申请人要求：英文专业或英文为母语，喜欢孩子，有教学工作经验。具体工作待遇及工作内容请联系刘小姐。</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>诚聘</b></p> <p>因本公司业务发展需要，现招聘以下人员：          1. 中英翻译 1名          2. 客户服务 3名          3. 市场经理 1名          要求大学本科文化水平，有相关经验。以上人员一经录用，工资待遇面议，待遇从优，包食宿。          联系人：钱先生</p>
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*Source: Discover China 4 – Student’s book, 2014, p. 36*

Most of the teachers interviewed in our survey claimed that the joint adoption of Learning-by-Doing method and authentic task method has enhanced didactic activity and promoted more vivid classroom dynamics. Some teachers reported to have adopted these two methods combined in some occasions, and observed that classes with heterogeneous language levels create the ideal substratum for a cooperative learning synergy, provided that activity is done in balanced groups. It has been noticed that learners with a more stable competence, while facing the task, naturally haul fragile students along the process and have them set their sight on the target rather than focusing too much on their poor skills. The class observation done during the activity has not shown a substantial increase in students’ language performance compared to data collected during other ‘traditional’ techniques, but has revealed a strong impact on collective behaviour and target-oriented motivation<sup>166</sup>. Students were visibly involved in the activity, they reported no pressure about the concern of evaluation and developed synergic collaboration forms to get the target achieved, even though interpersonal relationships in groups were not always good.

## **6.2 Teaching methods applied to Chinese characters**

Although research conducted in recent times has revealed a strong advancement in CFL teaching methodology in the West, European countries still debate the severe challenges that some intrinsic features of Chinese language imply for learners, especially for young learners. The class observation and the surveys to teachers we conducted between 2017 and 2019 have shown that students find particularly hard and discouraging

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<sup>166</sup> Rossi, 2020, p. 39

the acquisition of Chinese writing system, in particular Chinese characters. In this case, French and Italian present different sceneries. The cross analysis on Italian Syllabus for Chinese language (See par. 3.7) and the National Indications for school programmes<sup>167</sup> (published in 2010 and re-adapted in 2012) gives little consideration to linguistic gap between NL and Chinese language, consequently almost no attention is paid to the related considerable troubles students have to face when confronting with Chinese script, phonetics and morphology<sup>168</sup>. Disregarding this evidence confirmed by both theoretical and practical worlds, Italian education framework seems to place all the foreign languages on the same level in terms of exposure, teaching methodologies and assessment methods, no matter the typological distance between languages. According to National Indications then, 1<sup>st</sup> year students in high school might assume they can get the same proficiency in Chinese as in any other language they study by the end of their five-year curriculum. But is this really so? Empirical data on the matter are still relatively poor and depict situations not referable to a universal standard. We believe that, only as regards this case, teaching practice can help more than research, and according to both the assumptions of relevant studies<sup>169</sup> and our findings, Chinese writing system is definitely perceived as the most challenging element to teach and learn when dealing with CFL.

Historically, Chinese characters have always been a parameter to determine CFL level of proficiency inside and outside China. Even today, the threshold of advanced competence in Chinese reading and writing is normally represented by the mastery of approximately 3000 characters. From a CFL teaching perspective, however, sinographs are pointed out as the biggest obstacle for learning, their study requires some mnemonic

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<sup>167</sup>Source: [www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw\\_file/licei2010/indicazioni\\_nuovo\\_impaginato](http://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/licei2010/indicazioni_nuovo_impaginato) (18/09/2020)

<sup>168</sup>D'Annunzio, 2009, p. 189

<sup>169</sup>Klöter, 2017, p. 415



abilities which can be partially trained and developed. Moreover, to acquire a good level of literacy, learners have to cope with a study load and a learning time incomparable to what is needed for European languages. Considering the hard challenge Chinese characters represent, in the late 90s several textbook compilers and scholars<sup>170</sup> began to claim that Chinese language could be exclusively taught through the use of Pinyin, especially if oriented to communicative purposes. However, the mainstream teaching philosophy continues to refer to an ‘all-inclusive’ approach where script, sound and grammar do have equal dignity and importance. As briefly mentioned in section 2.5, instructors in China and abroad have elaborated four major strategies to facilitate characters memorization: character/word lists, mnemonic-oriented approach, etymology-oriented approach and context-based approach<sup>171</sup>. Character lists used to be widely adopted in mainland China and Taiwan. First of all, it is necessary to make a distinction between character list and word list. In the first case the list shows a selection of individual graphs (单字 *dànzi*) often ranked in alphabetical order according to their phonetic transcription in Pinyin; while in the second case the list shows words (词 *cí*) which can be formed by a single character or, more frequently, by two or three characters. The two kinds of lists aim at evidently different purposes, character lists are useful to develop recognition and writing abilities, providing solid basis for word association skill and lexical inference. This, to be clear, was the core idea that gave boost to the origin and diffusion of character threshold (SMIC) in France (See par. 2.5). Word lists, instead, aim at expanding and enhancing the lexical competence<sup>172</sup> (as for HSK word lists), paying less attention to the single graphs. Despite the above stated benefits, the use of lists has been a controversial topic across SL global teaching philosophies and has

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<sup>170</sup> Liu, 2009; Kubler, 2011

<sup>171</sup> In this section we decided to exclude the conventional practice of teaching characters by means of “radicals” (*clé* in French), since we agree with Goudin’s point (Goudin, 2015, p. 38-39) that radicals today are more likely to be used as a search key, rather than a real teaching method.

<sup>172</sup> Hu, 1997, p. 12-17

echoed in CFL world too. Some scholars pose the question under the perspective of teaching effectiveness, Chen<sup>173</sup>, for instance, supports the idea that CFL teaching is not as effective as other SL teachings because of quantitative reasons. In other words, the number of words proposed to learners in a coursetrack is not sufficient to handle a real conversation. He claims the necessity to expand vocabulary in intermediate levels and have it become a systematic process which can be facilitated by techniques like analogy, comparison and association. Still observing the matter from the perspective of situational method and authentic task-based teaching, the main concern regards the poor relationship between the words and the real-life situation in which they might occur. In fact, most of the words in a lists are completely disconnected from a specific lexical sphere, which makes their memorization a merely mechanic process, with no immediate application in a real context. Despite the controversial opinions researchers have on the effectiveness of lists in CFL teaching, J. Bellassen's leading position in French education system and the research conducted in the 80s have guaranteed the acceptance of 字本位 character-based theory and the consequent rise of SMIC system in France. A system, as said, focusing on characters rather than on words, whose selection is based on the principles of occurrence and combination ratio. As Bellassen clearly explains in the introduction of his "Méthode d'initiation à la langue et à l'écriture chinoises", SMIC's purpose is to limit the number of learn-able characters to a threshold of 400, and to provide various strategies to help memorisation:

«[...] Apprendre le chinois est un affaire de mémoire, dit-on communément. Mais la mémoire a horreur du vide : elle a besoin de supports. Une méthode d'apprentissage du chinois se devait d'en prendre acte, en fournissant le plus souvent possible les

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<sup>173</sup> Chen, 1999, p. 3-11

éléments aidant à la mémorisation de chaque caractère chinois ou sinogramme. Les supports seront visuels [...], auditifs [...] ou gestuels. [...] L'écriture chinoise est faite de signes, c'est un fait « incontournable » ...généralement contourné par les manuels, qui ne présentent que les mots sans prêter attention aux caractères qui les composent. [...] Il est des sinogrammes rarissimes et d'autres très fréquents : la fréquence est un critère, sinon absolu, du moins majeur dans le choix des sinogrammes qui composent ce manuel [...]. Les 400 caractères utilisés dans le texte ont été choisis de telle manière qu'ils permettent de reconnaître 66,27% de l'ensemble des caractères des lectures courantes [...] servant de norme pour le niveau du baccalauréat.» (Bellassen, 1989, p. 5)

«[...] It's commonsense to say that learning Chinese is a question of memory. But memory fears the empty: it needs some supports. A learning method for Chinese language has to recognise this assumption, providing as much as possible some elements able to help memorising every single character or sinograph. There will be visual supports [...], audio supports[...] and gestual supports. Chinese writing system is made of signs, this is "inevitable"...generally eluded by manuals, which present words without paying attention to the characters. [...] There are extremely rare characters and others very frequent : occurrence is a criterion , maybe not absolute, but a major criterion used to choose the sinographs included in this manual. [...] The 400 characters used in the texts have been selected in a way that enables the recognition of 66,27% of characters included in the current readings [...] serving as a standard for Baccalauréat level.»

On the other hand, in Italy 词本位 word-based theory is the most accepted pedagogical practice, that has clear demonstrations in most of CFL textbooks conceived for Italian learners. In particular, word lists (生词表 *shēngcíbiǎo*) are placed at the end of each dialogue or text, and show in sequence the graphs, the phonetic transcription, the grammar category, the Italian translation and the application example of any new word. Word lists usually contain terms related to a determined situation presented in the text or terms which may be functional to the introduction of specific grammar topic (Degree complement, potential complement, Result complement). In textbooks overtly oriented to communication, as the case of “Ni shuo ba”, word list occupy a marginal position as footnotes, with no reference to on grammar function or application fields.

Figure 26

“Parliamo cinese 1”

1. 2,50€

2. 780€

3. 53,50€

A: 你看，我的新电脑！怎么样？  
*Nǐ kàn, wǒ de xīn diànnǎo! Zěnmeyàng?*

B: 真棒！真好看！是什么时候买的？  
*Zhēn bàng! Zhēn hǎokàn! Shì shénme shíhòu mǎi de?*

A: 是昨天买的。  
*Shì zuótiān mǎi de.*

B: 多少钱？  
*Duōshǎo qián?*

A: 780欧元。  
*Qībǎi bāshí Ōuyuán.*

B: 不贵。是在哪儿买的？  
*Bú guì. Shì zài nǎr mǎi de?*

A: 是在一个大超市买的。  
*Shì zài yí gè dà chāoshì mǎi de.*

B: 不错，我也想买一台。  
*Búcuò, wǒ yě xiǎng mǎi yì tái.*

生词 Parole nuove	词汇 Lessico
新 <i>xīn</i> (agg.) nuovo 电脑 <i>diànnǎo</i> (sost.) computer 好看 <i>hǎokàn</i> (agg.) bello (da vedere) 真 <i>zhēn</i> (avv.) veramente 棒 <i>bàng</i> (agg.) forte, bravo, fico 超市 <i>chāoshì</i> (sost.) supermercato 不错 <i>búcuò</i> (agg.) corretto 台 <i>tái</i> (class.) per apparecchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Euro” si dice <i>ōuyuán</i> 欧元.</li> <li><i>Cuò</i> 错 vuol dire “errore”; quindi <i>búcuò</i> 不错 vuol dire “non male”, ovvero “corretto”.</li> <li><i>Zhēn</i> 真 come avverbio si aggiunge agli aggettivi per indicare “davvero molto”.</li> </ul>

Source: *Parliamo cinese 1*, 2018, p. 76

Figure 27

“*Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base*”

二、生词 Shēngcí		→ Vocabolario	
pīnyīn	carattere	classe gramm. e trad. italiana	esempi di uso
cāi	猜	(v.) indovinare	猜猜! 猜一下儿
chūshēng	出生	(v.) nascere	1980年出生
dàifu	大夫	(sost.) medico	王大夫 是大夫
dìdì	弟弟	(sost.) fratello minore	我弟弟 两个弟弟
gēge	哥哥	(sost.) fratello maggiore	他哥哥 一个哥哥
gōngsī	公司	(sost.) ditta; azienda	这家公司 大公司
gōngzuò	工作	(sost.) lavoro; (v.) lavorare	做什么工作 在哪儿工作
guānxi	关系	(sost.) rapporto; relazione; legame	没关系 关系很好
hào	号	(sost.) giorno (del mese); numero	三月二号
huānyíng	欢迎	(v.) dare il benvenuto	欢迎 欢迎你们
jièshào	介绍	(v.) presentare	介绍一个朋友 介绍一下儿
jìn	进	(v.) entrare	请进
jīnnián	今年	(sost.) quest'anno	今年25岁 今年去中国
kǒu	口	(class.) per i membri di una famiglia	几口人 六口人
mèimei	妹妹	(sost.) sorella minore	你妹妹 只有一个妹妹
nǎinai	奶奶	(sost.) nonna paterna; appellativo rispettoso usato per una donna anziana	我奶奶 我们的奶奶
nián	年	(sost.) anno	两年 1970年 二年级
niánjí	年级	(sost.) grado; classe (divisioni all'interno di un ciclo scolastico)	三年级 几年级的学生

Source: *Il cinese per gli italiani – corso base*, 2010, p. 160

Mnemonic-oriented approach and etymology-oriented approach are both techniques first born in China, then borrowed by most western CFL teaching practice. The first approach<sup>174</sup> claims that characters (or sometimes words) can be grasped in a more intuitive way if presented in a short story, often supported by a clip or a picture. This quite long process, indeed, is supposed to create a stable connection with long-term memory and bring to acquisition. During our observation, we noticed this practice is appreciated by native teachers (conversation teachers) and particularly meets beginner students' needs. The major examples can be drawn from CFL textbooks published in China<sup>175</sup> and in web tutorials. An example definitely closer to our scope is the one provided by Monique Hoa in her

<sup>174</sup> Matthews & Matthews, 2007

<sup>175</sup> Here we are referring to BLCU and Hanban series

“C’est du chinois” at the section “Clés”, (see figure below) where she often summarises a picture or a short story that a certain character evokes in a brief sentence. Another example we drew from the class observation is the way an Italian teacher explained the character *xiǎo* 小 (small) to a 1<sup>st</sup> year student: a mother saw her two children fighting for the same big piece of bread, and uses a knife to cut the big piece into two small ones. In this example, the story somehow depicts the graphical shape of the character in which the central body may indicate the blade of a knife and the lateral strokes the two slices of bread.

**Figure 28**

**“C’est du chinois!”**

岁	an (âge)	m	万岁
sui		61	↓ 山 山 山 岁 岁 岁 岁
		clé	山
		⊗	山 + 夕
		-S	歲 → 岁 simplification ancienne
		truc	Peu de montagnes ( moitié de 多 ) ne marquent pas l'âge du temps.
万	dix mille	m	万岁
wàn		31	→ 丄 万 万
		clé	一
		-S	萬 → 万 simplification ancienne
		0	𪛗 "scorpion"; emprunt phonétique
		truc	Dix mille ne remplit pas un carré.
祝	souhaiter	91	” 之 示 示 示 示 示 示 示 祝 祝
zhù		⊗	示 (clé des rites) + 兄
		0	示 兄 à gauche, un autel à droite, un homme à genoux priant un dieu

Source: *C’est du chinois!*, 1999, p. 199

The second approach, etymology-oriented approach<sup>176</sup>, can give origin to different techniques, it is definitely more related to morphology and was largely adopted by Bellassen in his “Méthode d’initiation à la langue et à l’écriture chinoises” in the section “mnémotechnique” (mnemonic

<sup>176</sup> Lo, 2002

techniques), as reported in the figure below. It consists of showing the origin and the association of single written components in order to facilitate the memorization of the whole character, a process to some extent referable to graphic paretymology. The example we report here is the explanation of the character *míng* 明 (bright): a combination between the left component – the sun – and the right component –the moon–, which are the brightest bodies in the sky. As one can infer from the given example, this second approach is applicable to a wide range of characters, in particular it finds an ideal application in the associative compounds (会意字 *huìyìzì*) where the internal constituents have their own semantic and morphological identity. However, it is necessary to remind that the Bellassen’s approach pursued in his manuals has not enjoyed a full recognition by French scholar community, in fact some linguists<sup>177</sup> have pointed out the limits of paretymologic approach for its amplitude and non-specificity of application.

**Figure 29**

*“Méthode d’initiation à la langue et à l’écriture chinoises”*

明	 日 + 月	"soleil" + "lune"
	 	la lumière du jour et celle de la nuit
跟		
	 跟 + 艮	élément de la jambe + élément phonétique
	 跟 足	élément de la jambe : le pied et la rotule
给 給	 纟 + 合	élément de la soie + "fermer"
	 	une ouverture et son couvercle
打	 扌 + 丁	élément de la main + "homme" (vx "clou")
	 	une main et un clou

Source: *Méthode d’initiation à la langue et à l’écriture chinoises*, 1989, p.

<sup>177</sup> Drocourt, Sagart

These two methodological approaches have proved to be beneficial for orthographic improvement at the advanced stage of CFL learning but not so much for character recognition and memorization at the early learning phase<sup>178</sup>. Another concern refers to the long time students spend on memorizing a huge number of phonetic and semantic components or short stories which may distract them from having a more holistic view of the language, which implies a consideration on other important aspects like communicative effectiveness, fluency and phonetic accuracy. The last technique, context-based approach, is probably the most all-inclusive and comprehensive one. It tends to blend the previous approaches in one. It has been developed in Western learning environments along with the increase of Confucius Institutes and conversation classes. It draws inspiration from the communicative approach but can also find a practical application in the authentic task-based teaching. It aims at expanding the students' lexical competence in a specific field, laying little emphasis on grammar structures and phraseology when needed. As it can be observed in the figures below, context-based strategies may vary from the analysis and contextualization of a whole set of words and phrases connected to a single topic (semantic strategy) to the analysis of a set of words and phrases connected to a single morpheme or graph (morphological approach). In the daily practice, the two strategies are often jointly used in the same learning module. A clarifying example we had the chance to observe is represented by a unit on transportation. In theory, from a semantic perspective, the teacher should present the words in separate groups, and each group includes a precise lexical strand (Vehicles: train, bus, car; Actions: go on, go off, ride; Directions: left, right). From morphological perspective, the teacher should build up a word map morphologically related to a single character (or

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<sup>178</sup> Ke, 1998



graphical unit) very significant for the lesson (i.e. words containing the unit *chē* 车 ‘vehicle’: *huǒchē* 火车 ‘train’, *diànchē* 电车 ‘tram’, *qìchē* 汽车 ‘car’ would be part of the same network). A formal example is provided by the book “Idéo-grammes” (Bernard-Moulin, 2018) which is not a school course but is connected to national school programmes of CFL, as publicised on the cover.

Figure 30

“Idéo-grammes”

动 dòng

**动** dòng : bouger, passer à l'action ; émouvoir  
 LV1 LV2 LV3 Ordre: 云力

**动** **動** **動**

**Idéogramme composé** : dans sa version archaïque, il semble que le sinogramme 动 partage la même origine que celle de 童 (tóng). Le caractère archaïque est constitué de de l'élément 辛 (xīn) dont le premier sens est celui du poinçon servant à tatouer un esclave, d'un œil 目 (mù), de ce qui pourrait être le fagot 束 (shù) et de la terre 土 (tǔ). Si l'on essaye de trouver un sens à ce sinogramme, on peut imaginer un esclave portant des sacs de terre. Un des premiers sens de 童 est celui d'un jeune esclave, de 8 à 15 ans; le sinogramme 童 signifiera « enfant » par la suite. Quant à 动, il va évoquer l'idée de bouger, d'agir, mais aussi de se mouvoir et par extension de s'émouvoir. Ces différents éléments vont fusionner pour former l'élément 童 (zhòng) et sera ajoutée la marche rapide 走 (zǒu) ou la force 力 (lì), avec lequel le sinogramme finira par se fixer. Dans sa version simplifiée, l'élément 童 a été remplacé par le nuage 云 (yún). Le sinogramme 动 donne l'idée d'une mise en mouvement, d'un passage à l'action, mais également l'idée de s'émouvoir, d'être ému.

HSK	动	dòng	(v. a.) bouger, passer à l'action
2	运动	yùndòng	(n.) [场] sport, exercice physique (v. a.) bouger, se mouvoir, faire du sport
3	动物	dòngwù	(n.) [只, 群] animal, bête
4	感动	gǎndòng	(v. a.) émouvoir (v. e.) être ému, touché
4	激动	jīdòng	(v. e.) être excité, agité, ému (v. a.) exciter, agiter
4	主动	zhǔdòng	(v. a.) prendre l'initiative, donner l'impulsion (v. e.) être actif (adv.) de sa propre initiative (n.) initiative, impulsion
4	动作	dòngzuò	(n.) mouvement, action, comportement
4	活动	huódòng	(n.) activité, mouvement physique
5	动画片	dòng huà piān	(n.) [部] dessin animé
5	震动	zhèndòng	(v. a.) vibrer, trembler (n.) vibration, tremblement, secousse
5	移动	yí dòng	(v. a.) déplacer, migrer, mouvoir (n.) migration
5	劳动	láo dòng	(n.) [次] labeur, travail physique (exp.) « excusez-moi de vous déranger »

Source: *Idéo-grammes*, 2018, p. 48

Figure 31

“Ni shuo ba”

**中医**

中医是世界上最古老的医学。和西医不一样，中医的观点<sup>1</sup>是：人和自然<sup>2</sup>环境统一<sup>3</sup>，人的身体和心理<sup>4</sup>统一。

大自然一年有12个月365天，人体有12条经络<sup>5</sup>和365个联系<sup>lián</sup>身体内外的穴位。<sup>xuéwèi</sup>气<sup>6</sup>在经络里运行，人就有能量<sup>yù</sup>适应<sup>lì</sup>大自然的变化。如果气不通，或者自然环境不正常，人的身体和<sup>zhèng</sup>



情绪也会有变化。阴阳<sup>7</sup>不平衡<sup>8</sup>时，人就会得病。中医看病是为了找到人体不平衡的原因，所以常问病人很多全身的问题。中医看病人的舌，按病人的脉<sup>9</sup>。<sup>shé</sup>

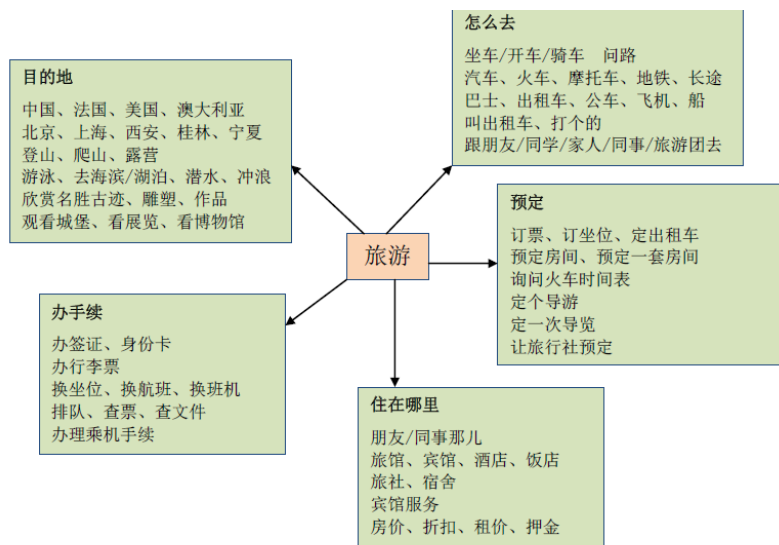
中医很注意<sup>10</sup>养生<sup>11</sup>，预防<sup>12</sup>得病。所以对人们的食物和生活习惯有很多建议<sup>13</sup>。每天早上，很多中国中老年人打太极，练<sup>liàn</sup>气功。

1. 观点 guāndiǎn : point de vue 2. 自然 zìrán : nature 3. 统一 tǒngyī : unifier 4. 心理 xīnlǐ : psychologie 5. 经络 jīngluò : méridien 6. 气 qì : énergie vitale 7. 阴阳 yīnyáng : yin et yang 8. 平衡 pínghéng : équilibre 9. 脉 mài : poulx 10. 注意 zhùyì : faire attention à 11. 养生 yǎngshēng : se maintenir en bonne santé 12. 预防 yùfáng : prévenir 13. 建议 jiànyì : conseils

Source: Ni shuo ba, 2013, p. 81

Figure 32

Unofficial teaching material (brainstorming activity)



Source: Teaching material drawn from “G. Carducci” high school, Italy

A common criticism one can raise against context-based approach is the little consideration given to the development of writing skills and grammatical awareness. However, following the evolution of CFL textbooks in the last two decades, the context-based approach has gained the approval of most of CFL environments both in mainland China and in the West. This is probably due to its learning effectiveness in improving lexical competence per definite learning unit, increasing overall character recognition ability, and contributing to foster general communicative skills.

### **6.3 Acquisition of speaking and writing skills: experimental methods**

Since CFL has become a formal, standardised coursetrack in Italian and French education system, learners have been overwhelmed by several clichés about Chinese writing system. The most common is probably the idea that modern Chinese comprises several thousands of characters completely different from one another. But reality is often very distant from how students figure it out. For example, it is well known that 93% of all reading and writing needs can be fulfilled by mastering only 1500 characters. Moreover, the total number of basic graphemes (essential units of modern Chinese script) can be summarised in 400 units and most of them are characters themselves<sup>179</sup>. Another issue frequently affecting SL learners is orthography, especially if considering the high relevance this discipline has in the case of European languages. Chinese writing skills might take a longer time to be mastered compared to alphabetic languages, but its orthography is definitely not the most difficult one. This is evidently because every single character has an invariable written form, thus can be acquired once and for all. Curiously, according to our survey, this particular aspect about Chinese language, despite being encouraging for learners, is not particularly perceived by students or, from another view, teachers do not put it in evidence.

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<sup>179</sup> Xing, 2005, p. 84

Although Chinese characters are evidently a key issue of CFL teaching and learning processes under multiple perspectives, it seems that none of the leading approaches treated so far and currently adopted in European basin does give them the importance they *de facto* deserve<sup>180</sup>. The hybrid approach we analysed in section 4.4.4 containing elements partially borrowed from formalism, partially from structuralism and most from situational method is renamed “unipolar method” by Bellassen (2010). It is formed by units including a text followed by a word list, some grammar explanations and the corresponding exercises. This method reinforces the idea that students should learn to read and write anything they learn to say. Vocabulary is presented in the form of glossaries where words are usually listed up following the order of apparition in the text, just little attention is paid to graphical components as if characters were as ‘transparent’ as combinations of letters. Still according to the analysis conducted on textbooks and the data emerging from it, we realised that unipolar method apparently does not consider three important principles of traditional Chinese writing philosophy. The first is that this method does not take into high consideration the fact that characters have the property to combine with other ones to form bisyllabic or trisyllabic compounds, which implies that once studied a limited number of characters, students are able to build up many lexical items. The second one is that compilers often relate word lists to texts with no (or little) consideration for the graphical complexity of (some) characters. Despite the clichés mentioned above, modern characters are formed by a limited range of graphical components that, we believe, if taught before other units are introduced, can make the acquisition of writing skills linear and gradual. An example may be the one provided by “Il cinese per gli Italiani – corso base” (2010), a textbook

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<sup>180</sup> An exception, as already seen, is represented by Bellassen’s SMIC approach in France. We chose not to mention it again here since its diffusion is closely related to Bellassen’s position in French education system.

currently adopted in university courses, high school and boarding school<sup>181</sup> courses at beginner's level. The character “thank” (谢 *xiè*) is first introduced in unit 3 because it shows up in a short dialogue about greetings and first introduction, even though its graphical shape is rather complex for absolute beginners and its occurrence limited to the words 谢谢 *xièxiè* (thanks) and 不谢 *búxiè* (you are welcome). A counter-example always taken from the same textbook is represented by the character 水 *shuǐ* (water) which, despite having a relatively simple graphical shape (only 4 strokes) and being the base of several daily words (水果 *shuǐguǒ* fruit, 喝水 *hē/shuǐ* drink, 香水 *xiāngshuǐ* perfume), learners have the chance to see it for the first time only in unit 12.

The third principle unipolar method seem to contrast is that, apparently, there no pedagogical logics is applied when designing word lists. The examples listed above show that (the majority of) words get listed as they appear in the reference text, without any selection based on their occurrence. The risk we remark onto learners is to train “learning omnivorousness”, that is to say students do not get used to prioritising the frequent characters (which are naturally the more useful ones) over the rare ones. In most textbooks it is quite common to find complex-shaped characters being introduced earlier than simple-shaped ones, our observation has revealed that this may turn out to be counterproductive for memorisation and acquisition. Getting back to one of the examples mentioned above, all beginner students in one of the classes we observed were able to say *xièxiè* (thank) but just few of them were able to write it down in characters. And if they did it, some strokes were put down in the wrong order or shaped in a non-regular form. Another examples in support of this assumption is drawn from “Modern Chinese Beginner's Course”

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<sup>181</sup> Convitto nazionale

(1980)<sup>182</sup>. The characters 跑 *pǎo* (run), 饱 *bǎo* (full) and 炮 *pào* (firecracker) can be respectively found in units 34, 40 and 42, while the character 包 *bāo* (bag, package) which is itself an original constituent of the first three characters, does not even appear in the textbook. We think these few examples may reveal how the unipolar method impacts on the acquisition of CFL writing skills and character visual memorisation, potentially lading down the learning process.

So far, Italian CFL teaching approaches and textbooks have not paid specific attention to teaching methodologies aimed at character memorisation and writing skill development, compilers and teachers have in fact preferred a hybrid approach mostly merging communicative approach and structuralism. We presume this attitude may be due to the lack of solid reference in teaching methodology, we have to bear in mind that Italy has been the scenery of a very fast CFL evolution and that CFL standardisation and disciplinisation in secondary and academic education are relatively recent phenomena. Conversely, in France, a country with a longer and more complete evolutionary line of CFL, the research of some pioneering scholars<sup>183</sup> has brought some important innovation in how words, characters, and writing skills are taught. This innovative perspective has progressively penetrated universities and schools in an experimental way and start from four key assumptions<sup>184</sup>. The first is that, during the first learning stages, it is preferable to disjoin the acquisition of oral skills from the acquisition of writing skills. This is basically possible because oral communication and speaking abilities rely on pinyin system, which guarantees students to pronounce all characters without being forced to memorise all of them. This approach is relatively recent and was formally

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<sup>182</sup> We chose to mention this textbook not for its relevance in Italian or French systems now, but because it was adopted for long time in CFL courses in Europe and US and acted as a reference for following manuals.

<sup>183</sup> Monique Hoa, Bernard Allanic

<sup>184</sup> Allanic, 2015, p. 30

recommended for the first time in French Official Bulletin<sup>185</sup> in 2002. The second assumption is that, along the teaching process, it is highly recommended to have a time gap between the apparition of a word in the speaking module and its apparition in the writing module. It is important to teach how to pronounce and use a word before teaching how to write it, especially if it is a complex-shaped character. For example, the characters 谢 *xiè* (thanks) and 喝 *hē* (drink), due to their occurrence and communicative relevance, had better appear much earlier in speaking modules than in writing ones. The third assumption is that, when doing teaching planning, the essential units of speaking activities are words and sentences, while basic units of writing activities are characters and, in certain cases, graphical components, whose list first appeared in French Official Bulletin in 2002. The fourth assumption is that teachers should not expect students to learn the writing form of all the characters included in speaking activities. This implies that teachers should prioritarily present the most frequent characters and the easiest to write. According to this last assumption, a character like 爱 *ài* (love), due to its relatively simple structure and frequency, is supposed to appear earlier than 视频 *shìpín* (clip). Starting from these assumptions, four pioneering textbooks were published in France between 1999 and 2009, and all of them embrace the principle of speaking-writing disjunction. In other terms, the revolutionary idea these textbooks introduces was the necessity to stop introducing the written and the oral form of the language at the same pace and by the same methods. The books include: “C’est du chinois” (Hoa, 1999), “Méthode de chinois - premier niveau” (Rabut et al. 2003), “Le chinois...comme en Chine” (Allanic, 2008), “Ni shuo ne?” (Arslangul, 2009). The underlying idea they have in common is the specific intention to go beyond unipolar method and lay more stress on a reasonable way to character acquisition. In addition, we believe this initiative aims to give the appropriate space back

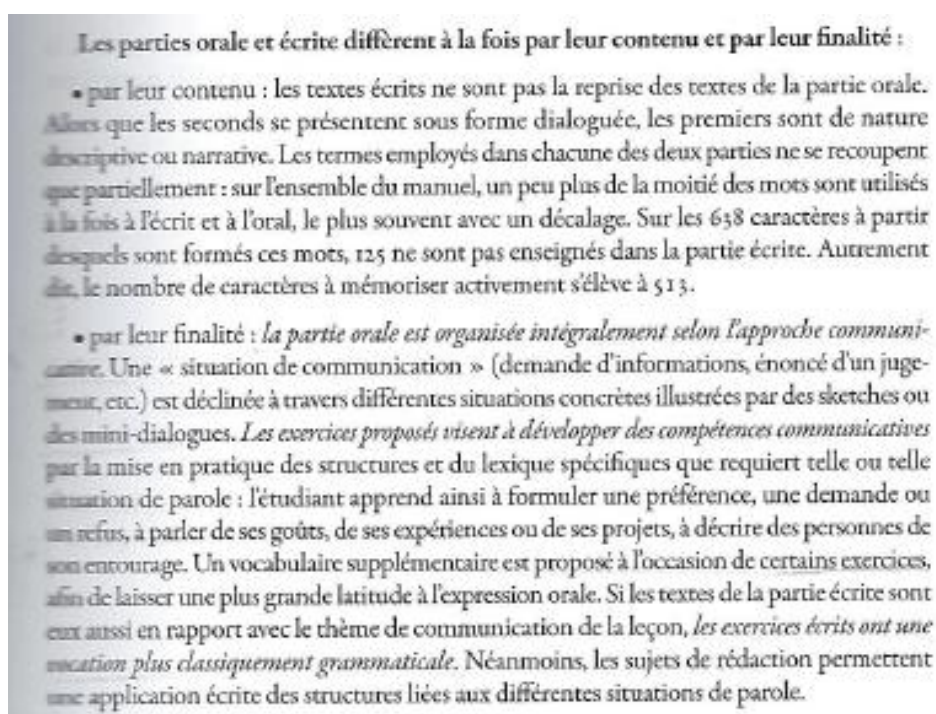
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<sup>185</sup> Bulletin Officiel

to the four language competences, and restore their place and timing along the teaching-learning process. The core idea of this method is that at a certain point of learning process, a Chinese language student is able to say much more than what is able to write. If a teacher expects learners to write exactly what they are able to say or pronounce, the outcome will not be satisfactory. Teaching practice has revealed that students achieve communication goals much faster and with more ease than achieving writing goals, so an effective method would suggest to disconnect the acquisition of writing skills from the acquisition of speaking skills. This theory takes shape in Rabut's "Méthode de chinois - premier niveau" and in Allanic's "Le chinois...comme en Chine", where the advice is to plan a "décalage" (gap) when treating speaking and writing or, in a more radical way, create a real "disjonction" (disjunction), which implies a sort of clean cut between the two.

**Figure 33**

### ***"Méthode de chinois – premier niveau"***



Source: *Méthode de chinois – premier niveau*, 2017, p. XI



**Figure 34**

***“Le chinois...comme en Chine – niveau débutant”***

**LES OBJECTIFS**

**Chinois oral : 1000 mots**

- Enseigner rapidement l'essentiel du vocabulaire oral de la vie quotidienne (1000 mots environ) et de la grammaire de base, en s'appuyant sur l'écriture phonétique du chinois, le pinyin, pour accélérer l'apprentissage.
- Donner la priorité à la pratique de la langue orale (écoute et expression) dans une variété de situations réalistes, choisies pour répondre aux besoins les plus urgents des personnes sur le point de partir en Chine<sup>1</sup>.

**Chinois écrit : 550 caractères**

- Enseigner 550 caractères choisis parmi les plus fréquents et les plus utiles du lexique chinois, qui recouvrent environ 80 % de tous les caractères des publications courantes<sup>2</sup>.
- Favoriser l'apprentissage des caractères en les enseignant dans un ordre logique tenant compte à la fois de leur composition graphique et du processus cognitif de mémorisation.
- Proposer une liste originale de 80 composants graphiques non autonomes, (ou CNA) permettant de nommer (pour mieux les retenir) toutes les parties constituantes des caractères enseignés<sup>3</sup>.

*Source: Le chinois...comme en Chine – niveau débutant, 2008, p. 19*

As one can easily infer from Rabut's and Allanic's introductory words, the method they propose intends to relieve speaking modules (treated through a communicative approach) of the burden of writing activities. In this way, they believe that learners would accelerate the word acquisition process, compared to unipolar method, and teachers may benefit from a higher degree of freedom, characters in fact should no longer be taught randomly but selected according to specific criteria. An example is the figure below drawn from Rabut's textbook, where the selection of words and expression for the section "comprehension et applications orales" differ pretty much from the characters selected in the section "expression écrite".

Figure 35

“Méthode de chinois – premier niveau”

Lesson 9

Échanger des informations

A. COMPRÉHENSION ET APPLICATIONS ORALES

• VOCABULAIRE [103]

1	zhǒng	espèce ; sorte
2	yuánzhǔbǐ	stylo à bille
3	qián*	argent
4	kuài*	1. [unité monétaire] 2. [classif. pour les savons, gommés, pains, gâteaux...]
5	fēn*	[1/100 de l'unité monétaire]
6	qiānbǐ	crayon
7	xiàngpí	gomme
8	zhǐ	papier
	xìnzhǐ	papier à lettres
9	yígòng	au total
10	máo*	[1/10 de l'unité monétaire]
11	zhǎo	rendre (de la monnaie)
12	yuè lái yuè*	de plus en plus ...
13	zhòng	1. (maladie) grave 2. lourd
14	nàme*	tellement
15	gēn...hǎo	1. être gentil avec 2. être ami avec
16	biàn	changer
17	shénme yìsi	Qu'est-ce que cela signifie ?
18	gēn...jiǎng*	parler à ; dire à ; raconter à ; expliquer à
19	zěnmē	comment se fait-il que... ? ≈ wèi shénme
20	tōngzhī	informer ; avertir ; prévenir
21	piányì*	bon marché

B. EXPRESSION ÉCRITE

• CARACTÈRES

1. Présentation des caractères

春	叶	气	暖	行
越	假	秋	社	飞
机	票	钱	千	百
块	元	贵	才	昨
冬	冷	宜	现	夏
封	信	讲	决	毛

Source: Méthode de chinois – premier niveau, 2017, p. 289-295

A following question may be how the acquisition of characters should be planned and which strategies may balance efficiency and study time. The two prominent solutions that French scholars have experimented in the last decades are, again, Bellassen's SMIC and Hoa's method. SMIC table of characters are selected on the basis of their occurrence in ordinary web and paper publications and according to their property to combine with other characters to form other relevant and frequently used words. But how was SMIC converted into teaching practice? Writing activities were planned in function of the threshold, the indication provided recommended to show students the etymology and the graphical constituents of any character listed in the table. Although explanations do not always appear realistic, they actually seem to arouse students' curiosity and interest. Also considering Bellassen's role in French education policy, the introduction of SMIC has ensured a solid database of characters students could refer to and a comfortable and regular guideline teachers could use for lesson plan. SMIC also contributed to standardise long-term learning objectives as for writing skill acquisition, moreover it represents the essential database of characters on which final examination (Baccalauréat) is designed. It must be said that, up to now, SMIC has proved its efficiency in primary and intermediate level students of secondary education, but has not been largely transferred to university courses, as it seems not appropriate for advanced learners. The second method attempting to develop a rational way to disjoin the development of writing skills from communicative skills is the one conceived by Monique Hoa and well presented in "C'est du chinois" (1999). In the textbook, the advancement of speaking and writing units, though being part of the same modules, appear substantially disjoined. Oral competence, based on vocabulary and grammar acquisition, occupies a marginal position, while the core skill the manual intends to develop is the writing skill. Hoa has learners observe and understand characters and their components, the technique she suggests largely relies on memorisation of

graphemes, their spatial disposition and, in a second phase, on combination. In the introduction of “C’est du chinois”, she briefly outlines the concept behind her methodology:

«[...] A l’origine, les éléments qui composaient les caractères étaient des représentations des objets du monde. Mais une longue évolution n’a pratiquement pas laissé subsister cet aspect figuratif. La première approche de cette écriture sera : OBSERVEZ. [...] Cette première approche vous aidera à mieux « sentir » les caractères. Vous entrerez ainsi en douceur dans ce monde nouveau.» (Hoa, 1999, p. 1)

«[...] Originally, the constituents of characters were representations of the objects in the world. But a long evolution has almost completely wiped away this figurative trait. The first approach of this writing system will be: OBSERVE. [...] This first approach will help you better «feel» the characters. So you will access this world in a sweet way. »

Similarly to SMIC, this method also embraces the principle of oral-writing disjunction, but it guides teachers to further prioritise the characters to teach, grading them according to their “functionality”. Hoa’s method gives decisive priority to phonograms (表音字 *biǎoyīnzì*), families of characters originally attributable to the same phonetic functional component but presenting, in their modern shape, some distinctive semantic constituents. The first examples of phonograms were found on oracle bones but it is at the time of Qin and Han dynasties that they started to sensibly multiply, representing today the 90% of all officially recognised characters<sup>186</sup>. From an educational perspective, identifying and explaining phonograms helps learners classify characters into families and memorise them according to

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<sup>186</sup> Drocourt, 2015, p. 19

phono-morphological criteria. An example is represented by the phonogram 主 *zhǔ*<sup>187</sup> in table 9. Its original form has acquired various semantic constituents (偏旁部首 *piānpáng bùshǒu*) over the centuries, which have given origin to several distinct characters in modern Chinese, called ideo-phonograms<sup>188</sup>.

**Table 9**

*Evolution of the phonogram ZHU*

Originated characters	Pronunciation	Meaning of the semantic constituent	Meaning of the character
住	<i>Zhù</i>	Person	Live
驻	<i>Zhù</i>	Horse	Locate
注	<i>Zhù</i>	Water	Pour
柱	<i>Zhù</i>	Wood	Pillar
蛀	<i>Zhù</i>	Bug	Moth

*Source: Rossi, 2019, p. 41*

In the introduction to “C’est du Chinois”, Monique Hoa presents the relevance of ideo-phonograms from a pedagogical perspective, in a simple way:

« Les caractères composés étant ainsi présentés, on pourrait croire qu’il est assez facile de s’y retrouver : un jeu d’indicateurs phonétiques et sémantiques nous permettrait, sans trop d’effort,

<sup>187</sup> Drocourt, 2015, p. 20

<sup>188</sup> ideo-phonogrammes

d'apprendre à lire et à écrire. Malheureusement, ce n'est pas le cas. L'évolution phonétique, sémantique et graphique a connu tant de vicissitudes, de transformations régulières et de bifurcations aléatoires, que très souvent il n'y a plus d'indications à proprement parler.» (Hoa, 1999, p. 24)

« The compound characters being presented in this way can make us think it is rather easy to get oriented. A game of phonetic and semantic indicators may allow us to learn to read and to write with just little effort. Unfortunately it is not so. The phonetic, semantic and graphic evolution has experienced such a big number of ups and downs, regular transformations and random bifurcations that no indications can be specifically mentioned today. »

Moreover, she provides three categories of examples, the first category where the phonetic component «joue encore assez bien son rôle», the second category where the gap between phonetics and semantics goes further, the third where the gap is wider than in the previous categories, sometimes still graspable (as in the figure below), sometimes not. With regard to the methods to foster writing abilities and character memorisation, we believe that Bellassen's and Hoa's contributions, compared to the inconsistency of Italian experimentation in this field, can clarify the different levels of awareness of CFL-related pedagogy between Italy and France. We are conscious that the effectiveness of teaching practice may depend on a number of factors, but we are still convinced that a privileged way to Chinese language acquisition starts from the comprehension of characters and their morpho-syntactic functions. We find interesting to continue exploring this field and the related pragmatic applications in the future, as it may lead to a substantive leap forward in CFL teaching practice.

Figure 36

“C’est du chinois !”

**1. Indicateurs phonétiques**

Reprenons les idéo-phonogrammes. Examinons une série de caractères où l'indicateur phonétique joue encore assez bien son rôle.

caractère servant d'indicateur phonét.	caractères idéo-phonogrammes
包 bāo envelopper	抱 (indicateur sémantique : 扌 main) bào porter
	饱 (indicateur sémantique : 饣 nourriture) bǎo rassasié
	刨 (indicateur sémantique : 刂 couteau) bào raboter
	炮 (indicateur sémantique : 火 feu) pào canon
	跑 (indicateur sémantique : 足 pied) pǎo courir
	泡 (indicateur sémantique : 氵 eau) pào trempier

les voyelles et les consonnes sont les mêmes que pour 包, mais non le

les voyelles sont la même que pour 包 mais non les consonnes ni le ton

Source: *C'est du chinois !*, 1999, p. 25

## CHAPTER 7. Digital teaching in Italy: a case study

### 7.1 Introduction

The advent of digital writing has entailed evident benefits for the global society. In the learning environments, digital technology has somehow reshaped the scale of SL skills to acquire along the study process and, at the same time, has redefined the order of priorities of conventional SL teaching philosophy. In CFL, a highly discussed question is whether learners are still supposed to handwrite Chinese characters or progressively shift to digital writing. It is undeniable that digital input systems have brought the concept of “writing” to a brand new dimension, now the point is to which extent this new concept should penetrate the teaching environment. There are some arguments in favour of digital writing in CFL practice, the most supported one is the evident relationship between the digital and real life. Since technology dominates daily communications almost everywhere, typing has become the emblem of authentic task-based teaching in several SL programmes. Chinese language, however, poses a further obstacle to this practice: its logographic writing system requires learners to develop efficient mnemonic strategies to enable character recognition and (re)production. Neurolinguistic research has proved there is an indissoluble bond between handwriting exercise and character recognition performance, which leads to think that handwriting is also closely linked to more general reading competence<sup>189</sup>. As a confirmation of this assumption, Longchamp in his study has shown that “handwriting memory facilitates the discrimination between characters and their mirror images for longer periods than typewriting memory” (Logchamp, 2008, p. 802).

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<sup>189</sup> Tan, Spinks, Eden, Perfetti, & Siok, 2005, p. 47



Leaving aside for a moment the CFL theoretical debate and focusing more on social phenomena, we can see that the widespread use of digital input devices in China has resulted into a substantial character writing incapacity, a phenomenon known as 提笔忘字 *tíbǐwàngzì*, somehow affecting the general level of literacy<sup>190</sup>. An inquiry conducted by the media company Asian Boss in 2018 showed the dramatic level of “character amnesia” of Chinese new generation<sup>191</sup>. In the study, several Chinese university students were asked to write on a sheet of paper some daily words like toothpaste (牙膏 *yágāo*) or sneeze (打喷嚏 *dǎ pēntì*): some of them weren’t able to write them at all, most of them were able to partially write them down, the remaining portion of them were able to write them properly. After the quick test, the interviewees could turn the paper to see the typewritten word, it was stunning to see that all of them could recognize and read out the word after seeing its graphical form but only few of them could write it by hand. This shows a huge discrepancy between passive competence level (recognition) and active competence level (reproduction), and it also demonstrates that native and non-native students need to develop distinct strategies for reading and writing skills. Apparently, most of the arguments listed above push to think digital input devices should not penetrate the learning environments, except for authentic tasks. However, academic programmes and secondary school programmes cannot underestimate two important variables: content and time. In Italian common practice, intermediate and advanced course tracks tend to compress many content units in a limited range of time. This leads to a first disproportion between the teaching time exposure and the learning time, and to a second disproportion between the overall study time and the load of content. Another element students must take into account is the exam format, in other words, the competences required to pass and the

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<sup>190</sup> Klöter, 2017, p. 417

<sup>191</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxHskrqMqII&ab\\_channel=AsianBoss](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxHskrqMqII&ab_channel=AsianBoss) (20/09/2020)

duration of the test. In Italy, CFL exam formats in universities and high schools normally include speaking (口语 *kǒuyǔ*), reading comprehension (阅读 *yuèdú*), translation (翻译 *fānyì*) and, more rarely, written production (书写 *shūxiě*). Except for beginner and elementary level tests, students are normally allowed to consult paper bilingual dictionaries, which facilitate their writing performance. Under these conditions, optimizing study time and selecting appropriate learning techniques are the core strategies for success, therefore students find it more beneficial to focus on lexical acquisition rather than on mechanical writing exercise. For this set of reasons, our research intends to explore the impact of digital applications on CFL acquisition process, in particular, we intended to find out the potential improvement in character recognition ability and lexical competence entailed by the use of a selection of digital learning devices.

## **7.2 Exploratory study**

Our study has drawn inspiration from the analysis of common teaching practice in Italy and intends to explore how web technology can be integrated in CFL teaching and learning processes. Before getting scope and objectives well defined, we have considered the following important theoretical aspects: firstly, the state of the art of CFL teaching in Italy and Europe; secondly, the teaching approaches to CFL and the main features of national CFL learning environments; thirdly, a general overview of CFL teaching programmes and regulations, and finally some of the major CFL learning (and teaching) challenges. Among the various techniques adoptable in classroom, we have concentrated on the role of web applications in SL teaching and learning processes, with specific reference to CFL field. In the light of it, we believe there is an urgent need to assess the impact of web devices on CFL learning and define its applications in current teaching practice. The following sections are entirely dedicated to the description of our exploratory study.

### **7.3 Objectives**

With the proliferation of digital writing and digital learning apps, students, teachers, textbook compilers and course designers are confronted with new challenges. The objective of our research is to explore and possibly define the relationship between the application of digital learning devices and the acquisition of reading skills and lexical competence in CFL sphere. The questions our study intends to respond are:

- a) Compared to conventional teaching, how can pedagogical practices that involve digital platforms impact on CFL learning?
- b) To what extent can this integrated approach influence CFL learners' reading skills and lexical competence and inference?

### **7.4 Research field**

Most of the empirical studies conducted so far have mainly focused on CFL teaching at university level. We believe the reasons for this choice can be summarised as follows: firstly, academic research in CFL teaching is often subsidized by departmental funds or interuniversity project funds; secondly, university is the point of contact among different disciplines like linguistics, didactics, SL acquisition theories and many others; thirdly, research centres are normally affiliated with universities; finally, academic environment includes a high number of staff units and students, so represents a broad and significant research sample. However, after careful analysis of CFL current situation in Italy, we found interesting to notice that the most striking phenomenon is taking place in secondary education, where the number of learners is gradually increasing and CFL has recently been framed in a standard dimension. Our preliminary analysis has brought to light some key features that make secondary school environment a

research field highly compatible with the purposes of our research. More specifically, these features can be summarized as follows:

a) Since in secondary education system CFL is a new booming discipline, it is highly likely that teaching practice is not yet fully consolidated, learning outcomes are not completely defined and, sometimes, materials do not meet young learners' needs. These conditions imply the necessity to tackle the research gap.

b) Students aged 14-19 years have to respect a weekly timetable of subjects and assignments, are used to working per time units, moreover, in their daily life, they presumably make extensive use of technology for interest and/or necessity. The combination of these two aspects can be particularly interesting for our study as the adoption of learning methods blending conventional techniques and digital tools may activate learners' motivation and latent skills, as well as making them feel more comfortable and familiar with teaching dynamics.

c) According to the national syllabus released in 2016, Chinese programmes in secondary schools comprise a wide range of linguistic and cultural contents. For example, third year students are supposed to deal with cultural readings directly in Chinese language, while fifth year students have to read and discuss in Chinese about social issues, politics, history and civilization. This implies that learners must find a way to improve reading skills and lexical competence and inference quite fast. For this bunch of reasons, we reckoned secondary school may include the appropriate learning conditions for our exploratory study.

### **7.5 Research sample**

The target school selected for the study is a secondary school in Ferrara (Northern Italy), more precisely a curriculum in foreign languages.

The research sample consisted of forty three students, aged 17-18 years, belonging to two fourth-year classes: class A of 23 students and class B of 20 students. According to the school timetable, fourth year classes attend four hours of CFL per week, one hour out of four is normally held by the mother tongue teacher. Both classes had the same conversation teacher and the same tenured teacher. However, as contents may vary from class to class, the solution we adopted to ensure the objectivity of data was to preliminarily define a unique learning module to investigate on, which was assigned to both classes in the same unit of time. The research was preceded by a three-week pre-analysis to familiarize with students, teaching set and learning environments. Data about the research sample were collected in the pre-analysis phase via questionnaires and interviews. Data about teaching practices, learning habits and learning outcomes were collected during and after the research time by means of direct observation, interviews and the analysis of students' written exams.

## **7.6 Pre-analysis**

The pre-analysis phase consisted of a three-week observation period carried out during conversation classes and during language and culture classes, the former were given by a native teacher, the latter by a non-native tenured teacher. The teaching approach in conversation classes varies from year to year according to learners' language skills. It largely relies on communicative-situational method: in the first two years teachers organize picture-word and sound-word association activities, and make extensive use of the interactive board and other web tools to activate class motivation. From the third year, teachers introduce more challenging activities and increase the exposure time to Chinese language. Students are required to develop more structured skills (reading comprehension, guided debate, topic-presentation, opinion-sharing), following a “global-to-analytic” sequence approach. Language and culture classes are normally

separable in two kinds: grammar lessons and culture lessons. Grammar lessons, given in Italian and Chinese, are strongly affected by formalistic approach. Both deductive and inductive methods are widely adopted: teachers often present a full topic to the class and provide the corresponding examples, some other times students are led through situational dialogues or short passages and extract themselves the underlying grammar rules. From the end of the third year on, grammar is progressively marginalised and culture classes become the core subject of the programme. Teachers present topics related to Chinese civilization, history, literature and current issues, the lesson medium is mostly Chinese. In this learning stage students are confronted with reading, writing and speaking tasks, therefore they have to adjust their learning strategies so as to cope with the new challenges. They are asked to increase lexical competence in various fields, develop a certain degree of fluency in speaking and perfection their accuracy in syntax. According to data collected on the pre-analysis phase, we came to the conclusion that fourth year students had the most appropriate features for our study, especially in consideration of teaching objectives, expected learning outcomes and linguistic awareness.

### **7.7 Research tools**

Among all the potential digital devices and web tools to research on, we made a selection according to some specific criteria: a) the device had to support two input systems: Latin alphabet and sinographs; b) the device had to be designed for learning purposes and not (only) for entertainment; c) the device application had to be compatible with the objective of our research; d) the device had to be free, so learners could download it and use it without any extra charge; e) the device should have a user-friendly, intuitive interface to catalyse motivation and avoid any distraction from the learning purpose. The selection indeed posed us several unexpected

problems, especially in the case of the points c) and d). Following a thorough analysis, our choice finally fell on two web platforms designed for learning purposes, with a set of features highly compatible with our criteria: Quizlet and Kahoot. Technically speaking, the two web platforms can be classified as free learning platforms with a responsive interface. Since they are basically designed for online use, they result highly compatible with almost any operating system. Both the platforms have a different access mode related to user's position: teacher or learner. Students can download the app version or use a common browser to join the learning platform with personal credentials.

Quizlet is a global platform designed and released ten years ago for two purposes: on one hand, to facilitate the preparation of teaching units and lesson plans, on the other, to dynamize learning process and working memory. Today it can be considered one of the largest student and teaching online learning community in the world, it counts over 30 million students a month, 3 billion study sessions done, and 200 million word sets, being used from secondary school to university and professional training courses. It provides engaging and customizable activities available in different modes, among all of them, we selected two web functionalities particularly in line with our objectives: Flashcard and Quizlet learn. With Flashcard teacher builds up bilingual word lists which can be matched to virtual classes. Once generated the class link, students can join and practise in group or in self-learning mode. With Quizlet learn, the vocabulary flashcards seen in class can be revised over and over at home on the smartphone app, this mode can mark learning progress percentage and adapts the learning sessions according to the user's error rate. If used in a systematic and guided way, these two functionalities activate visual and auditory memory processes, helping students to store a wider range of lexicon and graphs in a shorter time.

Kahoot is a game-based learning platform designed to administer quizzes, discussions and surveys, it consists of a classroom response system played by the whole class in real time. The core feature of the platform is the possibility to create multiple-choice quizzes, in this phase teachers write questions and answers, set the features of the game (number of items, score, timing) and are free to upload images, videos and audio tracks. The application is very intuitive, teachers simply have to enter the quiz with personal credentials, project it on a screen or on an interactive board, have students join the game session and let them play with their smartphones, tablets or computers. One of the most important features is that at the end of each game session, the system automatically generates a result report which can be used as a progress profile table. The game brings a lot of interaction to the classroom and acts as a motivational catalyst even for the most passive students. Most users enjoy the competitive nature of the quiz sessions and comment that it helps them retain concepts. From a didactic perspective, quiz is a dynamic and precise assessing tool, able to evaluate various competences in the same session (lexicon, morphology, syntax, phraseology), it is therefore highly compatible with our research objectives.

## **7.8 Methodology**

The learning module selected for the two classes was around the theme of health and medicine. The module, called “I have to see my doctor” (我要去看病 *wǒ yào qù kàn bìng*), included a set of inputs which were given in the same way and order to both classes: a) a list of over 200 lemmas, with lexical expansions provided by the native teacher. The fields covered ranged from body parts, state of health, symptoms and diseases to medicines, treatments and hospital care. b) Three written dialogues: the first entitled “I don’t feel well” (我不舒服 *wǒ bù shūfu*), the second “I see my doctor” (我看医生 *wǒ kàn yīsheng*), the third “At the pharmacy” (在药



店买药 *zài yàodiàn mǎi yào*). C) A three-minute video clip entitled “Take the medicine and you’ll feel better” (吃了药就会好一些 *chī le yào jiù huì hǎo yī xiē*). In the first week, the teaching plan was the same for the two classes, the teacher adopted the same teaching strategies and went through the topics in the same sequence: topic presentation with a quick brainstorming and a following careful analysis of the first half of the word list (first hour); careful analysis of the remaining words on the list and role-play exercise on the first dialogue (second hour); role-play exercise on the other two dialogues and revision of the first dialogue (third hour); video and pair work activity (fourth hour). At the end of the fourth hour, the teacher gave assignments for the second week and planned a written test for the beginning of the third one. In the second week the plan changed according to the class group. Class A followed a conventional methodology, which included the following phases: homework correction (about 45’), revision and repetition of dialogues (about 60’), close reading of two related texts (about 75’) and role-play activity (about 60’). Class B plan started with conventional activities and progressively integrated them with pedagogical tasks on digital learning platforms. The four phases were scheduled as follows:

- a) (about 60’) general revision of the dialogues and close analysis of the video script;
- b) (about 60’) vocabulary building task with Quizlet Flascard function. The activity consisted in projecting on the interactive board a selection of 80 flashcards from the list, lemmas appearing one by one. Once formed pairs of students, the teacher asked student A to read the lemma aloud, possibly without glancing at Pinyin transcription, then had student B make a coherent sentence with the lemma; finally student A and B swapped their roles for the upcoming word. The 80 lemmas were selected on the basis of high occurrence and graphical complexity;

c) (about 60') pair revision of the whole word list in Quizlet live mode. Students worked in pairs in a semi-autonomous way, student A showed a lemma on the smartphone to student B, who had to read and translate it, checking the correctness directly from the App, the exercise ended with sentence formation. After thirty minutes, the two roles were inverted. The teacher moved around the classroom all the time to clarify potential doubts and make sure the activity proceeded smoothly.

d) (about 60') final revision session with Kahoot. The teacher had prepared a multiple-choice quiz which included lemmas, sentences from the studied dialogues and new sentences whose meaning could be inferred from the characters contained in the word list. The game included 30 questions having 30 seconds each to be answered. The teacher often stopped the game to give further explanations or in-depth considerations. At the end of the session, the system showed result reports, so the teacher had the chance to comment on individual learning progress profile figures.

At the end of the second week students had three days to prepare for the written test. According to interviews, 83% of students from class A declared they mainly adopted conventional techniques to memorize lexicon and structures. They basically wrote each lemma repeatedly, they read dialogues several times and some of them decided to build up semantic maps to facilitate mnemonic processes (17%). On the other hand, all students from class B declared they used Quizlet live app to practice at home, 45% of them reported having used it for more than seven hours during the three days break. Moreover, 60% of the interviewees declared to have integrated Quizlet live app practice with traditional handwriting exercise, which, they claimed, represented a consolidated study habit.

## 7.9 Results

The written test included two structured tasks and a semi-structured task: a vocabulary exercise comprising 30 lemmas to recognize and translate into Italian, a scrambled dialogue to reorder, and the production of a new dialogue of about two hundred characters. Students had sixty minutes to complete the test without dictionary, the evaluation scale ranged from 4 (F) to 10 (A). Considering that the test format and the assessed learning outcomes were the same for the two classes, we analyzed the data belonging to the two samples from a comparative perspective.

In the first task, we considered erroneous any misspelled lemma, wrongly translated lemma and near synonym of the given lemma. Test showed that only three students from class A managed to translate all lemmas (13%), two students translated 28 lemmas (8.7%), ten students confused or inverted 3 to 5 lemmas (43.47%), the remaining part of the class did not translate 6 or more lemmas from the given list. In class B, seven students managed to translate all the lemmas (35%), four students translated 28 lemmas (20%), seven students inverted or confused 3 to 5 lemmas (35%), the remaining two did not translate 6 or more lemmas. The second task was evaluated on a pass/fail criterion, a single error in the sequence of statements was enough to fail the whole task. Thirteen students from class A managed to reorder the whole dialogue (56.52%), in class B seventeen students succeeded (85%). From the results, we can observe that a satisfactory level of performance in the first two tasks (first two categories of students in task one and students who got 'pass' mark in task two) has been attained by a considerably higher number of students from group B than group A, in particular +33,3% in the first task and +21,8% in the second. This may indicate that working on random lemmas from a given list on web flashcards and doing pattern drills on smartphone live mode might have activated learners' visual stimulation, as we could

observe that the frequency with which students could see and recognize sinographs was sensibly higher than the one registered on paper based exercises of group A. From this hypothesis, we assumed that a higher visual frequency of sinographs on a web platform, along with dynamic exercises of lemmas recognition done at different times a day comfortably from one's smartphone could have represented a motivating and efficient learning strategy for students, at the same time, it could have helped working memory to processes a relatively higher number of lemmas in a more comfortable study time.

As for task three, we encountered some difficulties in data collection due to the nature of the task itself. In fact, by definition, semi-structured tasks let students a higher degree of freedom in answers which may affect the objectivity of data. In addition, there were two other important factors to take into account before collection: a) despite indications, students wrote productions of variable length, b) students used a lexical range which was naturally wider than the target language contained in the list. In order to ensure objectivity and yet comply with our research goals, we decided to assess the handwriting competence, more precisely, we assessed the accuracy in strokes (笔画 *bǐhuà*) and components (偏旁 *piānpáng*) handwriting of target lemmas by comparing the number of miswritten target sinographs and the total number of target sinographs used in the composition. To do so, we only considered sinographs which had not been provided elsewhere in the test, hence we could track the real efficiency of visual memory processes. This decision made our work tougher than expected for two reasons: firstly because the number of sinographs to analyse varied from student to student; secondly because on average over 50% of the characters used in compositions by both groups were drawn from the other two tasks of the test. The analysis showed two main tendencies: A) students preferred to use sinographs with a simple structure

or a low number of strokes. For instance, to translate the word ‘patient’, students preferred the lemma 病人 *bìngrén* (10+2 strokes) rather than the lemma 患者 *huànzhe* (11+8 strokes). B) Students tended to use target lemmas containing at least a frequent sinograph already acquired in their past. For example, students preferred using the lemma 生病 *shēngbìng* (to fall ill) than 得病 *débing*, as the sinograph 生 *shēng* is among the most structurally simple and frequently frequent in modern Chinese, students in fact start to familiarize with it in first year, in words like 学生 *xuéshēng* (student), 生日 *shēngrì* (birthday), 出生 *chūshēng* (to be born). According to the assessment principles we adopted, the results from the two groups showed quite a wide discrepancy in error rate. Almost half the students (11) from class A miswrote 55% to 58% target sinographs, while the remaining half of the group registered an error rate ranging from 17% to 24%, which resulted in an average error rate in written accuracy of 38,5%. As for group B, nearly one third of students (7) miswrote 38% to 45% target sinographs, while the remaining two thirds miswritten sinographs only ranged from 11% to 14%, which resulted in an overall error rate of 27%. The 11,5% gap between the two groups pushed us to think that, once more, training on flashcards in classroom and playing on sinographs at home gave learners many more chances to train visual memory on specific graphs, probably because the exposure time to sinographs randomly shown up on digital app was much longer than the one spent on paper exercises by students from group A. This methodology enabled group B to watch closer and longer components, radicals and the overall shape of characters, with the result of a higher degree of accuracy in handwriting performance. The analysis of results from task three has revealed what we believe to be a key response to our research questions: a learning strategy where conventional exercise is integrated with practice on digital app and web platform, under certain conditions of target and time, has proved to train learners’ passive abilities (mere sinograph recognition) into active abilities (sinograph reproduction

with no reference or support tools). We have drawn this conclusion also on the basis of the typologies of errors: in group A most errors involved lacking components missing sinographs in compound lemmas and wrong radicals; while in group B no lacking or missing components were registered, errors mostly consisted in the mere inversion of components. In addition to the objective results collected from the tasks, we also did some observation during the test so we had the chance to analyze students' attitudes to the test. We noticed that, once handed over the exam sheet, 16 students from group A (69,6%) chose to start from task two, then moved to task one, and finally went through task three. Group B instead acted differently, 17 students (85%) started from task three, then moved to task one and finally completed task two. We have to add that, although teachers were carefully monitoring the classroom dynamics so as to prevent from cheating, students from each class might have found a way to communicate and make a common decision on which task to do first. Regardless of what might have happened, the different choices made by the two groups may reveal different scales of priority as well as different ways to perceive the difficulty of one task or another. Task one and two mostly involve the application of passive abilities, such as translation of single lemmas from SL to native language and sequencing of given statements with clear syntax markers. On the contrary, in task three students have to perform active abilities, in this case written production, which stands for a definitely tougher challenge in SL acquisition process (Laufer, 1998). In fact, being able to produce some written or oral utterance in SL brings up quite a wide range of linguistic abilities (accuracy in morphology, interiorization of syntax, mastery of lexicon and semantics, knowledge of fundamentals of pragmatics) as well as some wider and transversal competences, like text writing style, paragraph management and communication abilities in written form. Our interviews revealed that students from both groups found it quite hard to perform such a wide range of skills on a topic-based short

essay, firstly because writing tasks normally take a longer time and threaten the overall time management, secondly because students could not benefit from any paper or digital support devices which would have ensured more self-confidence, and finally because they feared the possibility to forget or miswrite sinographs. The evidence shows that, regardless the perceived difficulty, most students from group B decided to start just from task three. We tried thus to interpret the two attitudes in relation to our research questions and, this led us to think that probably the two groups had a different perception of their strengths and weaknesses about test they were going to take. Since most students from group A chose to start from the first two tasks, we presumed they felt to be better trained in performing passive abilities (vocabulary recognition and sequencing); conversely, most students from group B decided to begin with task three, which made us suppose they felt much more confident than group A in performing active abilities (vocabulary and speech production). This divergence in students' perception and confidence, we believe, might be the result of the different teaching strategies addressed to the two groups. In other words, we inferred that the two digital platforms integrated with individual, pair and collective training sessions did not only promote learning motivation in group B, but also facilitated the transition from passive to active along the acquisition process, making most students feel so familiar with the target vocabulary to actively apply it on a topic-based essay with no much concern.

Another important consideration mitigates in favor of our assumptions. Given the same test to be completed in the same unit of time, we observed that only 11 students from group A (48%) completed and handed back the test before the time was over, while 6 students (26%) did not manage to complete task three in the given time. In group B, 16 students (80%) had already handed the completed test back to the teacher 10 minutes before the whole hour was up, the remaining 4 students handed

it back at the scheduled time. A closer analysis showed that all students having handed the test before the time was up generally got satisfactory results. Time management is a crucial element when taking tests, students often learn to manage time on their own. Especially in writing tasks, the teachers explained during the interview, students tend to run out of time quite often and ask for additional minutes. In our test, this unexpectedly did not happen in group B. This evidence reinforces the assumption that integrating the conventional learning practice with digital platforms and devices specifically designed for vocabulary acquisition facilitates memory processes and promotes active vocabulary abilities in SL on one side, on the other it increases students' confidence and awareness of their strengths, and has a significantly positive impact on performance levels and time management.

#### **7.10. Conclusions**

We believe that the results of our study may represent a relevant contribution in the field of SL acquisition in secondary education. At a time when there is a constant increase of demand and supply of CFL courses in Italy, it is even more urgent to explore some innovative and effective pedagogical practices able to facilitate and support the acquisition process of Chinese characters. From our analysis, it appears that a hybrid pedagogical practice blending conventional techniques with web tools (Kahoot) and digital devices (Quizlet) can lead to significant improvements of determined skills.

The results of the first two tasks showed that the number of learners exposed to digital and web devices having had an excellent performance is, on average, 27,5% higher than the number of students only subject to conventional techniques. This means that, given a limited lexical scope and a definite learning time, the progressive integration of traditional



techniques with specific digital tools can positively impact on learners' memory strategies, increasing the effectiveness in sinograph and word recognition and inference, as well as in sentence interpretation. Moreover, the figures of the third task showed that learners having practised on digital app proved a 11,5% higher writing accuracy in target sinographs, compared to students subject to conventional pedagogical techniques. Our study suggests the existence of an evident relationship between digital-based learning resources and the more efficient acquisition of two complementary abilities in written Chinese: passive and active vocabulary. We believe that the progressive introduction of digital-based pedagogical tools in secondary school practice can support and facilitate CFL learners along their acquisition process. Our research has revealed that the most relevant benefits concern the passive acquisition of Chinese lemmas and the accuracy of sinograph handwriting skill, two among the most challenging skills CFL learners face in secondary school according to the survey we conducted. In addition, being digital tools essential components of young students' daily life, a hybrid pedagogical methodology may help them feel much more motivated to practice on dynamic user-friendly devices than on workbooks, with the result that they may also gain more confidence in Chinese script and optimize their learning time management.

Nevertheless, we believe that the contributions drawn from the present study should be considered as a starting point in the analysis of new teaching technology in CFL pedagogical practice. Considering the current situation of CFL learners and teachers in Italy, on the basis of our findings, we believe it is urgent to explore methods and pedagogical practices to assist students to cope with CFL big challenges. In particular, we think it would be interesting to analyse how digital and web tools can improve passive and active phonology and aural comprehension on one side, and facilitate written comprehension on the other. Moreover, to continue our

research and gain a more thorough understanding of the impact of digital pedagogy on CFL vocabulary learning process, in the future it would be advisable to explore applications and feedbacks of digital devices specifically designed for Chinese lexical acquisition. Finally, in the light of the debate around the controversial efficiency of word lists in SL acquisition, in a near future we envisage to analyse the response of a web tool or an application for vocabulary acquisition designed through a contextual or situational method.

## **CHAPTER 8. Teaching practice and classroom dynamics**

### **8.1 Introduction**

As reported several times in our work, the analysis we have conducted covers a wide range of pedagogical contexts, and lays emphasis on two levels of education in particular: academic level and secondary school level. The choice to focus on these two educational environments is motivated by their relevance in the construction and consequent development of CFL as a structured discipline in the two countries. To give just one example for all, during our examination we have noticed more than once that the selection of a particular approach (which may be determined by a number of factors whose analysis has been treated in the previous sections) in a specific educational environment ended up orienting textbook compiling processes and philosophies, as shown in chapter 6. In recent times, it is rather unclear whether methodological approaches have directly affected teaching practice and, consequently, textbook compilation or, vice versa, pedagogical practice puts pressure on textbook compilers to pursue a determined methodological line, especially in the case of profit-oriented publishing houses. Aware of the intimate connection between teaching methodology and pedagogical practice, and also fully conscious of how much strategies and techniques can vary according to the educational context and the target learners, we consider it appropriate to devote a portion of our analysis to the inspection of (some) pedagogical features related to CFL teaching practice. Our work has brought to light that the adoption of any methodological perspective and its transposition into teaching practice has to be assessed in relation to a number of variables, whose relevance and roles have been thoroughly analysed along chapter 4.

One variable for all is the target learner to which the pedagogical actions are addressed, we can easily infer it from the conclusions of our case study presented in chapter 7. In fact, if the study had been conducted on a different sample of learners (academic course for specialised learners, academic course for non-specialised learners, vocational or technical institute), the strategies would have probably been different and the choice of digital tools would have probably been made on some different platforms or apps, which implies that the collected data in all probability would have led to a different conclusion (or maybe not). This example shedding light on the guiding role that environment and target learners have onto pedagogical practice gives us the spur to push a little forward the boundaries of our research, inspiring us to take a closer look at teaching strategies and practices adopted by CFL instructors in university and secondary education. We thought the best way to gain a good understating of this various and heterogeneous scope of investigation would be the direct observation of classroom dynamics and the interview with teachers and instructors about teaching planning and methodological considerations. Given the wide range and the multiformity of pedagogical experiences, we found it appropriate to make a prior selection among the potential fields of analysis, therefore we decided to limit our observation to three of them: courses for non-specialised adult learners, academic courses for specialised learners, secondary school coursetrack. Why this choice? This is mainly supported by the assumption that these three fields represent the widest range of CFL teaching and learning environments as well as covering the widest range of potential learners. In addition, the research conducted so far provides evidence about the leading role played by universities, secondary schools and language institutions in the definition and advancement of CFL pedagogy in recent times in Italy and France. For these reasons, we came to

the conclusion that our observation sessions had to be done in these three contexts.

## **8.2 CFL courses for non-specialised learners**

The observation of lectures for non-specialised adult learners was conducted during the first semester of a.y. 2018/19 at the “Maison des Langues et des Cultures” at the University of Grenoble Alpes (UGA). Before we actually got in the classroom, we were informed about the nature of the courses to observe. This kind of lectures in Grenoble is formally open to the whole citizenship, but as far as we could observe, they were generally attended by university students not enrolled in foreign language tracks, for this reason lectures were offered under the name of “cours de langues pour non-spécialistes”. A quick survey in the classes we had the chance to get in touch with revealed that the majority of participants were mainly enrolled in business and economics, social sciences, philology and literatures, only a few of them were coming from scientific departments. Some of the participants accepted to take part in a brief interview about their motivation to attend Chinese voluntary class, most of the interviewees from beginner’s level class claimed the strongest spur to take up Chinese language despite studying for a different major was curiosity and personal interest. However, some of them added that personal interest sometimes is not enough to access the next level, Chinese language is in fact one of the most challenging voluntary language courses a student can sign up for, so it requires a bigger effort to successfully get through it, compared to other languages offered in the centre. Only a small minority of them stated they took up Chinese beginner’s class for the credits earned by the end of the

semester<sup>192</sup>. In apparent contrast with what beginner's students claimed, the majority of intermediate and upper intermediate class interviewees declared instrumental motivation as being the strongest push for their choice, in other words, they meant to acquire some fundamentals of ordinary Chinese language in order to qualify their profile, integrate their academic degree and be more prepared for an international career. Considering the discrepancy in learners' motivation from beginner's to intermediate classes, we could actually infer that only students who envisaged to get a real benefit from Chinese language in the future would struggle to study it up to more proficient levels. Conversely, most students not showing an explicit instrumental motivation would end up quitting the course soon after the first stages. We were given the great opportunity to observe three levels of Chinese language courses at "Maison des Langues et des Cultures", level A1 held by Mr. Chen, level A2.1 held by Ms. Zhang and level B1.2 held by Ms. Li, all of them being Chinese native speakers with good communicative skills in French. During the whole semester, every level class was held once a week, and we used to participate as silent observers, that sometimes took part in the conversation (or explanation) if the teacher decided to. Teachers were not professionals, they played much more the role of 'language instructors' as they were PhD candidates in FL or Asian studies. This, we observed, represented a great advantage for teaching approach in class, teachers' age and learners' age were pretty much the same so the whole lesson could be done from a peer-to-peer angle, with a good dose of interaction and almost no affective filter. This result was also achieved thanks to the number of learners per class, which normally did not exceed twenty. Teachers agreed to take part in a small interview and seized

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<sup>192</sup> We report this fact just for statistic reasons, not for its relevance to our analysis.

the chance to exchange some views about their methodologies and teaching plan, they declared they had previously planned out with the course coordinator the syllabus to cover during the course. We could observe the macro topics varied from level to level, level A1 covered the essentials of Chinese language (like phonetics, common verbs, numbers and so on); the following levels focused on topics connected to real life, from travelling and doing shopping to debates around 热门话题 (*rèmen huàtí*, hot topics). Apart from the definition of level syllabus, which had to be planned under the supervision of the course coordinator, teachers were left free to select any teaching strategy (and material) they found suitable to their class. No formal textbooks were adopted in class, teachers used to self prepare materials which mainly consisted of photocopies and multimedia materials like clips or sound tracks. Our observation revealed that the level of interaction and the ability to catalyse learners' attention and motivation were not much related to learners' language skills, but mostly relied on teacher's attitude and capacity to manage classroom dynamics (always remembering that teachers were not professionals). From students' perspective, we noticed that Ms. Zhang's lessons were pretty much involving because she largely adopted a dialogical approach with students, split the lessons in smaller modules and frequently livened up the lesson with short clips, dramatisation exercises and cooperation groups. Despite the single attitudes (which is, to some extent, an immeasurable aspect of our research) we could observe a couple of patterns highly recurrent in classes, regardless from levels and the teachers. The first is the adoption of a communicative approach (See chapter 6) that pushed teachers to lay particular emphasis on communication, we noticed all teachers made extensive use of situational approach, almost every new module started

from a dialogue script or a clip presenting a real-life circumstance with a standard interaction among the characters. After a first contact with the new situation, teachers generally brought students' attention to phrases and small statements particularly relevant to the development of the situation itself (i.e. the ordinary utterances of a standard customer and a standard shop assistant when buying new clothes), little attention was paid to grammar and syntax. To students' requests for a grammar explanation, we happened more than once to hear teachers reply with other examples of the same structure without any explicit mention to grammar rules, as if memorising 'how' to say something was much more relevant than understanding 'why' something was said that way. Probably this attitude contributed to lighten the burden of a formal lesson and let students "free from the cage of grammar" (Ms. Zhang), but we sensed that some requests were left unanswered in a certain way. The second recurrent pattern is somehow connected to the first and is also a common feature of CFL pedagogy in mainland China: the emphasis on word lists (See Chapter 1 and 6). We observed that every lesson used to begin with an explicit word list that learners read aloud with teachers, in B1.2 level class word were not listed as in previous levels, but teacher used get back to new words several times after the first reading and listed them on the board for the weaker students to write down. The interesting fact was that, probably in the frame of an overtly communication-oriented approach, little attention was given to characters, once again the stress was laid on pinyin (pronunciation) and meaning, which were actually the major focuses in the final test. Generally speaking, we perceived a good level of satisfaction among learners and a great involvement from teachers' part, we think the approach we could observe at "Maison des Langues et des Cultures" was after all appropriate to non-specialised learners for several reasons: the study load was



measured for non specialists, pedagogical techniques were well designed to draw attention and make the course lighter than a formal one, learning goals were set in accordance with learners' motivational patterns, pretty much oriented to life situations and job purposes.

### **8.3 CFL courses for specialised university learners**

The second observation session was conducted prior to the one just explained, it took place in the second semester of a.y. 2017/18 at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. The observation was done in the language course named "Lingua Cinese 1" which was part of the master's degree in "Lingue, economie e istituzioni dell'Asia e dell'Africa mediterranea" (LEISAAM). Unlike the observation described above, this course was addressed to 1<sup>st</sup> year master students of Chinese language curriculum, so the main difference consisted in the fact that the sample of our analysis was now a class of specialised learners having studied Chinese for three years at bachelor's level. The course was addressed to a class of approximately 50 students, the majority of them coming from Ca' Foscari bachelor's degrees, the minority coming from other Italian or foreign universities. In this case we did not have the chance to interview learners in a formal way, but we had the opportunity to exchange some views with the professor (Prof. Abbiati). She explained that any standard CFL course addressed to specialised learners in Ca' Foscari includes two sub-courses, a main course normally held by a non-native speaking professor (full professor, adjunct professor, researcher or lecturer), a second course held by a native speaking lecturer. This bipartite structure is largely adopted in all academic language courses in Italy and, according to the commonsense, responds to the need of providing a double perspective to the discipline. We only had the chance to observe the main course held by the Italian professor, we noticed it

covers a wide range of grammar-related topics in the first two years (especially morphology and syntax) and shifts to reading comprehension and translation in the following years. The sub-course held by native speaking lecturer instead focuses on conversation topics with increasing levels of difficulty or, in some cases, on translation from Italian to Chinese. We could notice a completely different pedagogical dimension compared to the one experienced in “Maison des Langues et des Cultures”. Every lesson of the main course we observed started with a close reading of a text that students had previously worked on at home. Every text was about a different social issue and the teaching approach most of the time was a grammar-translation approach. The teacher had students read a passage in turn and give the appropriate translation in Italian language, the main focus was to make the translation fluent and adequate to the context and to the rendering in L2. In the case of long subordinating clauses or typical 书面语 (*shūmiànyǔ*, written language) structures, teacher stopped for a while and made a digression or simply brought to memory syntactical rules studied in the previous years. In these occasions, despite being the general approach tending to formalism, we had the chance to remark that inductive and deductive strategies did alternate according to convenience. We understood that bachelor’s degree courses focus more on syntax rather than on translation, being the first stages of learning acquisition, therefore an inductive strategy seems to be more beneficial for learners to bridge typological distance in L1 and FL syntactical patterns. In this case, teacher normally presents general rules and provides supportive examples or pattern drills for students to do at home, we guess this might be conceived to synchronise teacher’s methodology and the approach adopted by the grammar textbook commonly used at Ca’ Foscari (*Grammatica di cinese*

modern, Abbiati, 1998). Conversely, in master's degree classes, where the teaching focus moves away from grammar and embraces translation and written comprehension, teachers tends to elicit students' pre-knowledge starting from the examples provided in the text, then, if necessary, moving back to general rules. We observed that the interaction between teacher and learners, despite the lesson being held in Italian, was reduced to the essential, students replied to questions if necessary and only the most dynamic of them offered their contribution to the collective translation, most of the time they were busy in taking notes and quite rarely happened to cross teacher's eyes. As one could expect, the pedagogical dimension was very distant from the one experienced in Grenoble, sometimes we had the sensation that the formalistic approach adopted in class contributed to slightly increase the gap between teacher and learners. As far as we could observe, the technique adopted to work on texts was effective, it was useful to elicit students' background knowledge and stimulated a continuous exchange during the lesson whose purpose was to gain the 'best' possible translation. No cooperative learning modules or strategies relying on multimedia materials were chosen, that would have probably been too divergent from the lesson focus. In the attempt to compare the two experiences conducted at university level, we could definitely remark a couple of evident differences. The first and most foregone difference consists in the nature of the two courses observed, the first in Grenoble for non-specialised learners, the second in Venice for specialised master level students, which brings a series of further implications we will not reconsider at this point, such as learners' motivation, learning goals, teaching strategies and materials. The second, less transparent difference lies in the pedagogical atmosphere in classroom, we remarked that the presence of a peer instructor left the students free to (inter)act and play a

more active role in the scene, which is the case of voluntary courses in Grenoble. It must however be said that this attitude may not only come from a more confidential pedagogical circumstance, but may also be learners' natural response to the genuine involvement in a real-life language situation or the effect of a strong communication-oriented stimulation.

#### **8.4 CFL courses in secondary education**

The third and last observation session was conducted in the second semester of a.y. 2017/18. As already thoroughly examined in section 3.7, Italian secondary schools (both public and semi-public) have been experimenting the insertion and development of CFL in school curricula for almost 20 years now, and the standardization of language outcomes is yet to come. The target school selected for our observation was “G. Carducci” high school, a Modern Language High School in Ferrara, Northern Italy. The observation was carried out for a time span of two months on a regular basis, and conducted on 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, 63 students in total. Similarly to what observed in the case of academic courses for specialised learners, the weekly amount of CFL classes in this particular kind of high school was split in two sub-sequences, the majority of them (approximately two-thirds) held by the tenured teacher (non-native) and one hour per week held by the conversation teacher (native). The school administration gave us the opportunity to conduct a formal survey on learners, so we decided to use a paper-based survey consisting of three parts: a background questionnaire, a BALLI<sup>193</sup> questionnaire<sup>194</sup> and a “think

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<sup>193</sup> Horwitz, 2008; Gass, Selinker, 2001

<sup>194</sup> In order to conduct our survey in a CFL-oriented way, we submitted a double BALLI questionnaire, comprising a general section and a BALLI Plus section for a total amount of 50 multiple choice items to respond.

aloud” questionnaire about learning strategies (See Annexes)<sup>195</sup>. The background questionnaire provided some clear data about learners’ motivation(s) to take up Chinese language, which does nothing but confirm the results we had informally collected in Grenoble’s “Maison des Langues et des Cultures”. 27% of the sample declared the intention to learn more about Chinese language and culture stems from personal interest or refers to a form of sympathy for Chinese community. This may find its root in the increasing presence of Chinese immigrants in Italian schools who somehow affect local students’ emotional sphere. The second motivational orientation declared by over 60% of the sample could be classified as instrumental: students hope to gain a benefit from mastering Chinese language, especially for career opportunities and personal advancement. The questionnaire shows this motivation pattern is stable and constant from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and, surprisingly, reaches a peak of 80% in the first learning stages. BALLI and BALLI Plus questionnaires gave us the opportunity to examine learner’s beliefs about Chinese language, we found out students’ beliefs actually vary according to the increasing awareness and the level of confidence with CFL gained along the learning process. As a proof of this, we observed that 1<sup>st</sup> grade students’ beliefs have a certain level of unawareness, especially about the nature of the language itself. 72% of them believed that studying Chinese is much harder than studying European languages (the percentage decreased to 62% among senior students). Over 75% thought that characters are definitely the most difficult component when studying Chinese, while only 15% of them considered the tones the hardest component. This pushed us to think that the teaching method the students had experienced in the previous learning stages

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<sup>195</sup> We specify that the three tools selected for our survey have been properly adapted to CFL secondary school learners and duly translated to learners’ native language (Italian) prior to submission.

(obviously not connected to CFL) may have focused more on the written performance than on the oral one. Intermediate students declared to see a strong connection between the study commitment and the learning environment. In particular, 84% of the sample believed their commitment is mostly a response to an appropriate teaching method. In the comment section of the questionnaire, students clarified what they meant by ‘appropriateness’, a clear method able to get students involved along the process. Almost opposed to this is the response of 1<sup>st</sup> grade students, whereof over 50% declared their personal commitment depends on the final mark, especially compared to their classmates’. This evidence shed light on the fact that competitiveness is a strong push for classroom dynamics and personal achievements in the learning process, in particular in the first years. From the last survey conducted, the “think aloud” questionnaire about learning strategies, we found particularly relevant the fact that 65% of the whole sample declared to use rather passive learning strategies. The majority of students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade memorise characters only through repetitive writing exercise, 64% of them memorise the pronunciation of a word reading it aloud several times or consulting the book glossary, a small percentage declared to memorise the meanings through the components/radicals of the single characters. Just few students (around 18%), declared to rely on more dynamic active and personalised strategies, to name some of these: the association between old and new characters to memorise graphic shapes and the meanings, the redaction of personal word lists roughly grouped into semantic categories. Last but not least, a good percentage of senior students reported to make extensive use of digital tools or applications to train character recognition ability, this strategy is apparently not very popular among junior students who still rely on more conventional techniques, probably also in consideration of the

lower amount of characters to memorise. In the light of the data collected from the surveys, we conducted one observation session per week in every class observation during language and conversation lessons. Although target students and learning environment were sensibly different from the academic contexts, we noticed several common aspects with the previous observation experiences. We observed that conversation teachers mostly select a communicative-situational approach, in 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes we remarked that most techniques rely on picture-word association and sound-word association exercises. This choice is made possible by the presence of a smart board in every classroom and turns out to be very functional to motivate young learners (aged 14-15) and capture their attention for a longer time. The more language level goes up, the more variable techniques are employed in class, in fact at intermediate learning stage (3<sup>rd</sup> grade to 5<sup>th</sup> grade), conversation teacher tends to vary the rhythm with reading comprehension, guided debate, topic-presentation and opinion-sharing exercises. We found it very interesting to notice that the common approach during conversation hours is highly inductive, teacher hardly ever presents rules or formulas, she tends to show examples in a context and spur students to repeat and reuse the same pattern. Language lessons are normally held by non-native teachers and comprise a number of sub-subjects, from grammar to composition, from culture to literature to lexical expansion. We mostly observed grammar lessons and some literature lessons in 5<sup>th</sup> grade; by analogy with the observations reported in the previous paragraphs, here we will merely focus on grammar ones. Firstly, we remarked that the pedagogical atmosphere is sensibly more formal and less recreational, probably due to the different relationship students have with the tenured teacher. Unlike what reported in the case of Ca' Foscari University, in high school we noticed that the approach to grammar is not

that rigid, apparently is not so affected by formalism nor can be completely defined a ‘grammar-oriented’ approach. As far as we could observe, the teacher substantially relies on a comprehensive textbook (Parliamo cinese 2, Masini, Zhang, Gabbianelli, Wang, 2017), designed around an overly deductive logic. Taking inspiration from the central position of competence in school curricula<sup>196</sup>, the textbook compilers offer macro-units including four sub-units, each of them covering a set of skills like: situational vocabulary, grammar, exercises, listening and/or composition, cultural prompts (See section 5 and 6). In every sub-unit learners can find a linear and recurrent four-step sequence: dialogue, word list, grammar notes and exercise session. The observation showed that the methodological sequence adopted in the textbook fits quite well into the teaching models designed around learning unit (It: Unità di apprendimento)<sup>197</sup> concept, a recurrent sequence when teaching Italian as a foreign language (IFL) and other European languages. We noticed that such a hybrid methodology offered in the textbook represents a solid point of reference for teaching practice. The teacher in a brief interview with us declared textbook’s approach provides a reasonable balance between communication and grammar aspects, without one prevailing on the other, and moves in a ‘global-to-analytic’ logic, which is quite intuitive though, and easily graspable by weaker learners. However, she added, textbook does not represent the sole resource to teaching, multimedia also has an essential role to keep motivation up. Moreover, in order to take a deeper look at some language structures, teacher often needs to supply extra materials and hold a frontal, more deductive lesson.

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<sup>196</sup> Scapin, Da Re, 2014

<sup>197</sup> Castoldi, 2017



## **8.5 Final considerations**

To make a brief conclusive point to this section, this last observation session in high school differs from the two conducted in academic context for a number of reasons (target students, students' age, number of students per class, relationship with the teacher and many more), the most relevant aspect among those in our opinion concerns the hybrid teaching methodology we had the chance to experience. We think the choice to combine several approaches in one may be motivated by various factors, it can be the effective response to a younger target compared to university students, it can also be the result of a non-standardised discipline still experiencing an exploratory phase or, yet, it can be the testing ground for the definition of a more multilateral and less monolithic approach to CFL. We envisage to pursue our investigation in this field and try to establish a relation between didactic effectiveness and the selection of a certain methodological approach, given a definite sample of learners.

# CONCLUSION

In our research we examined CFL's current status in Italy and France through the lens of two processes that have supported the constitution of CFL as a discipline. The first one is institutionalisation, which may be defined as the whole of external actions aimed at legitimising CFL as a discipline and providing a recognition in official texts. In this sense, the establishment of chairs in universities and schools, the creation of specific teaching qualifications, the activation of academic and school curricula, the publication of national syllabi, the introduction of CFL in the final exam of secondary school, the constitution of associations and research teams are to be considered decisive factors in the definition of CFL position as a discipline. Our research has brought out the fact that CFL has experienced a process of gradual democratisation in the two countries. Since its first apparition in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in France and in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Italy, CFL has been less and less considered a prerogative of specialists and scholars and has progressively become an accessible discipline in every level of education. This institutionalisation has been promoted by several pushes, some of them related to European humanistic tradition, as the curiosity for foreign cultures, others more related to economic interests or resulting from international and national policies, such as the "éducation plurilingue et interculturelle" in France or the constitution of CEFR at a European level. The second process is the standardisation of CFL as a discipline, which means that all the disciplines related to Chinese language get defined and distinguished both at academic and secondary level. Every field of knowledge having Chinese as an object contributes to make CFL a consistent and coherent discipline, with a set of defined contents, tools and objectives. The definition of learning goals for every level of education has strongly contributed to prioritise teaching activities, in parallel, language proficiency tests able to assess language competence, like HSK, have formalised the notion of "standard" and further regularised CFL borders and entity.

Our research has brought to light the dualistic nature of CFL as a discipline. On one side we find CFL as a scientific discipline, a theoretical field of knowledge pushed forward by academics, on the other CFL as a teaching discipline. These two natures revolving around the same object are substantially different in a single aspect, CFL as a teaching discipline has necessarily undergone a number of manipulations which may fall within the concept of “*didactisation*”. The most decisive among them is certainly the necessity of programming, CFL, as any other normalised teaching discipline, needs to get its teaching objectives well defined, it needs to determine the competences to acquire in relation to the target, how long it takes to acquire these competences and by which means. This step has been made possible thanks to some educational policies at a national or regional level that have created the right conditions for CFL to become teach-able. On one side, formal textbooks and national syllabi have contributed to normalise the teach-able contents, on the other, the experimentation of teaching practice and the hybridisation of approaches have contributed to tailor general methodologies on CFL’s requirements. We are fairly sure that CFL’s position is largely recognised both in Italian and French educational systems, however the socio-cultural backgrounds and the different language policies have led CFL to different levels of disciplinisation in the two countries. In France, CFL enjoys a relatively high stability thanks to the figure of Joël Bellassen and the influence exerted by his didactic theories. His character-based approach, although strongly debated, paved the way for a solid pedagogical framework providing a wide range of references to secondary school teachers and learners, from the selection of linguistic contents on a national base to the definition of rigid competence levels. Despite the evidently high degree of standardisation reached since the late 80s, CFL in France still preserves a good margin of methodological innovation like, for example, the speaking-

writing disjunction method proposed by Monique Hoa<sup>198</sup> and Bernard Allanic<sup>199</sup>.

Regarding Italy, our analysis has revealed that CFL has gained in the years a less stable position than in France. A first reason, we reckon, can be attributed to the absence of a figure like the one Bellassen embodied for long time in France. The lack of a national reference may have drawn insufficient attention to the issue of CFL definition. The analysis of the state of the art has shown that numerous projects and initiatives related to CFL have been launched at regional level, take for example Lombardy, but just few of them have had an impact on a national scale. A second reason may be related to the lack of specificity CFL had until few years ago. Our examination in fact has brought out that since the introduction of a plurilingual approach in schools, Italian government has rarely differentiated the educational policies according to the different foreign languages. For long time, CFL teaching modules, objectives, timetables and techniques have been subjected to the same regulatory framework as any other European languages taught in schools, regardless from CFL's peculiarities and linguistic challenges for Italian learners. These first two reasons have contributed to slow down the normalisation and standardisation processes of CFL as a discipline in Italy, however, in recent times, there is one element that has decisively consecrated CFL's institutional position in secondary education: the realisation of the national syllabus in 2016. Since its release, syllabus has been used as a reference for teachers to plan long-term teaching activity and for compilers to remodel methodological concepts in language textbooks. The third and last reason we noticed is more related to historical facts: CFL was introduced as an experimental discipline in Italian secondary education in the early 2000s and started to gain a foothold on a national scale only around 2010-2012.

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<sup>198</sup> C'est du Chinois, 1999

<sup>199</sup> Le chinois...come en Chine – méthode de langue et d'écriture chinoises, 2008

We assume that such a short evolutionary line along with a partial lack of normative references and a still vague pedagogical framework have not allowed CFL to gain a fully coherent and institutionalised dimension.

In Italy the boundaries of methodological experimentation have not been pushed as far as in France, so it would be very uncommon to see examples of innovation like the ones proposed by Hoa or Allanic. Class observation, surveys and theoretical research have shown that CFL teaching practice in Italy is still deeply rooted in formalistic approach, both university and school teachers make extensive use of grammar-oriented and translation-oriented techniques, often complemented by conversation-oriented lessons held by native instructors. With the advent of pragmalinguistics and the rise of communicative approach and all its correlated methods (situational method, learning-by-doing, authentic task), the last decade has witnessed a gradual evolution and integration of methodological perspectives both in Italy and France. Communicative performance has gained an unprecedented relevance in language education and, consequently, ended up exerting a strong influence on CFL teaching methodology. From the comparative analysis of the most used language textbooks in the two countries<sup>200</sup>, we have noticed that the “hybrid” approach seems to be the most largely adopted as well as quite appreciated by teaching community today. It results from the fusion of three major components: a large base of communicative elements (dialogues, audio tracks, role-plays, conversation prompts), some formalistic elements (grammar explanations and translation exercises) and some aspects borrowed from structuralism (pattern drills). In our research a small section has been dedicated to the exploration of some innovative teaching tools, like web platforms and digital applications, and their impact on learner’s performance. In this sense, we noticed that using the functionalities of

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<sup>200</sup> For the French side the series of “Ni shuo ne/ya/ba” (Arslangul). For the Italian side the series of “Parliamo cinese” and “Il cinese per gli Italiani” (Masini et al).

digital and web learning devices under certain conditions and in relation to specific objectives can contribute to increase students' performance in determined areas (writing ability and character recognition, in our case) and to catalyse learning motivation. We believe that the correlation between teaching techniques and learning processes is a field that will ensure many more research opportunities, this is what will push us to continue our investigation in the near future.

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# **APPENDIXES**

## Appendix I

### Background Questionnaire for CFL learners

#### Questionario conoscitivo per discenti di Cinese Seconda Lingua

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Il presente questionario è somministrato ai soli fini di ricerca, le tue risposte saranno strettamente confidenziali.

1. Sesso:   M   F
2. Età: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Nazionalità:
  - a) Italiana
  - b) Cinese nato/a in Cina/Taiwan
  - c) Cinese nata/a in Italia/Europa
  - d) Altra (specificare) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Qual è la tua prima lingua?
  - a) Italiano
  - b) Cinese mandarino
  - c) Cantonese
  - e) Altro (specificare) \_\_\_\_\_
5. C'è qualcuno tra i tuoi familiari più stretti che parli cinese mandarino? Seleziona tutte le risposte del caso
  - a) Sì, i miei genitori (uno o entrambi)
  - b) Sì, i miei nonni (uno o più)
  - c) Sì, fratelli e/o sorelle (uno o più)
  - d) No
6. Quale è stata la tua esperienza diretta con il cinese prima del Liceo? Seleziona tutte le risposte del caso
  - a) Parlavo spesso cinese a casa con i familiari
  - b) Parlavo occasionalmente cinese a casa con i familiari
  - c) Non ho mai parlato cinese in famiglia
  - d) Non ho mai sentito nessuno della famiglia parlare in cinese
  - e) Non ho mai sentito i miei amici parlare cinese
  - f) Altre esperienze con il cinese  
(specificare)\_\_\_\_\_
7. Oltre al cinese, parli alter varietà di lingue asiatiche?
  - a) No
  - b) Sì, parlo un dialetto/varietà del cinese (specificare)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Sì, parlo un'altra lingua asiatica  
(specificare)\_\_\_\_\_

8. Perché hai deciso di imparare il cinese? Seleziona tutte le risposte del caso
- a) Sono stato influenzato/convinto da genitori e familiari
  - b) Sono stato influenzato/convinto da amici e compagni
  - c) Sono stato influenzato/convinto dai miei docenti
  - d) Mi interessa la lingua cinese
  - e) Mi interessa la cultura cinese
  - f) Mi interessa studiare all'estero dopo il liceo
  - g) Mi piace essere differente/originale, parlare cinese è fuori dall'ordinario
  - h) Penso mi possa servire per la mia carriera futura
  - i) Voglio viaggiare
  - l) Penso di avere attitudine per le lingue, perciò ho deciso di studiare una lingua così difficile
  - m) Credo che le lingue asiatiche siano più difficili di quelle europee, quindi ho voluto provare
  - n) Altro (specificare) \_\_\_\_\_
9. A che anno di corso sei?    1°    2°    3°    4°    5°
10. Da quanto studi il cinese?    1 anno    2anni    3anni    4anni  
5anni
11. Stai studiando altre lingue straniere oltre al cinese? Sì \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- Se sì,
- a) Che lingue? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Da quanto le studi? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
12. Quante ore di lezione di cinese ci sono nel tuo piano di studi?
- 2 alla settimana     3 alla settimana     4 alla settimana     5 alla settimana
13. Cosa ti viene di solito insegnato durante le lezioni di lingua cinese? Seleziona tutte le risposte del caso
- grammatica     ascolto     traduzione     comunicazione  
 scrittura
14. Cosa ti viene di solito insegnato durante le lezioni di cultura? Seleziona tutte le risposte del caso
- civiltà e tradizione     storia     letteratura     politica e società
15. Quante ore alla settimana studi il cinese, al di fuori delle ore di lezione?
- a) Meno di 5 ore
  - b) Dalle 5 alle 10 ore
  - c) Dalle 11 alle 15 ore
  - d) Dalle 16 alle 20 ore
  - e) Oltre 20 ore
16. All'interno dell'apprendimento del cinese, il mio obiettivo è di diventare abile in
- a) lettura e scrittura

b) conversazione e ascolto

c) entrambi i punti precedenti

17. Ti piace imparare le lingue? Sì\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ In passato mi piaceva, ora no\_\_\_\_\_

18. Considerando la tua media dei voti in cinese, come valuti il tuo livello attuale di cinese?

Scarso 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Eccellente

19. Come valuti il tuo livello di competenza generale in cinese in rapporto al livello di competenza dei tuoi compagni di origine cinese?

Decisamente migliore 10 9 8

Circa alla pari 7 6 5

Decisamente peggiore 4 3 2 1

20. Come valuti il tuo livello di competenza generale in cinese in rapporto al livello di competenza dei tuoi compagni di origine non cinese/non asiatica?

Decisamente migliore 10 9 8

Circa alla pari 7 6 5

Decisamente peggiore 4 3 2 1

21. Come valuti il tuo livello di competenza generale in cinese in rapporto al tuo livello di competenza nelle altre lingue che studi (Inglese, Francese, Spagnolo, Tedesco...)?

Decisamente migliore 10 9 8

Circa alla pari 7 6 5

Decisamente peggiore 4 3 2 1

22. Al termine del liceo, hai intenzione di scegliere un percorso di laurea che possa includere il cinese?

Sì\_\_\_\_\_ Perché?\_\_\_\_\_

No\_\_\_\_\_ Perché?\_\_\_\_\_

Ancora non so\_\_\_\_\_

Perché?\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix II

### Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory - Student Version

#### Questionario sulle opinioni circa l'apprendimento del Cinese Seconda Lingua (versione studente)

Regole di compilazione del questionario:

- Leggi ogni affermazione attentamente
- Per ogni affermazione decidi se sei: (1) pienamente d'accordo, (2) d'accordo, (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo, (4) in disaccordo, (5) pienamente in disaccordo. Non ci sono risposte giuste o sbagliate, ma solo risposte personali.
- Per indicare la tua opinione, poni una crocetta sul numero corrispondente.

Questionario
1. È più facile imparare una lingua straniera da bambini che da adulti. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
2. Esistono persone che nascono con una speciale abilità che le aiuta a imparare una lingua straniera. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
3. Esistono lingue più facili di altre. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
4. Il cinese è una lingua: (1) molto difficile; (2) difficile; (3) di media difficoltà; (4) facile; (5) molto facile
5. Credo che alla fine imparerò a parlare il cinese molto bene. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
6. Gli Italiani sono abili nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
7. È importante parlare il cinese con pronuncia eccellente. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
8. È necessario conoscere la cultura di un Paese per imparare a parlarne la lingua. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
9. Non bisognerebbe dire qualcosa in cinese finché non si è in grado di dire quella

<p>cosa correttamente.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>10. È più facile per chi già sa parlare una lingua straniera impararne un'altra.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>11. Chi è bravo in materie scientifiche o matematiche non è bravo nelle lingue.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>12. È meglio imparare una lingua straniera nel Paese in cui si parla quella lingua.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>13. Se sentissi qualcuno parlare cinese, andrei a parlargli/le per fare pratica.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>14. È corretto provare a indovinare una parola in cinese, se non la si conosce.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>15. Se si studia una lingua straniera per un'ora al giorno, quanto tempo occorrerà per parlare quella lingua molto bene?</p> <p>(1) Meno di un anno; (2) 1-2 anni; (3) 3-5 anni; (4) 5-10 anni; (5) è impossibile imparare una lingua studiandola un'ora al giorno.</p>
<p>16. Ho attitudine per le lingue straniere.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>17. Imparare una lingua straniera consiste principalmente nell'acquisire nuovo lessico.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>18. Nell'apprendimento linguistico, è importante ripetere molto e fare molta pratica.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>19. Le donne sono meglio degli uomini nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere.</p> <p>(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo</p>
<p>20. Gli Italiani credono sia importante parlare il cinese.</p>



(1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
21. Mi sento a disagio quando parlo cinese di fronte ad altre persone. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
22. Parlare cinese in pubblico o con amici mi fa sentire differente e originale. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
23. Se agli studenti di cinese viene concesso di commettere errori nelle prime fasi di apprendimento, sarà poi difficile sbarazzarsi di quegli errori in seguito. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
24. Imparare una lingua straniera consiste principalmente nell'apprendimento di molte regole grammaticali. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
25. Vorrei imparare il cinese in modo da poter conoscere meglio i cinesi. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
26. È più facile parlare una lingua straniera piuttosto che comprenderla. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
27. È importante fare pratica nel laboratorio linguistico. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
28. Imparare una lingua straniera è diverso dall'imparare le altre materie scolastiche. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
29. Imparare una lingua straniera consiste primariamente nel tradurre dalla propria madre lingua. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
30. Imparare bene il cinese mi aiuterà a trovare un buon lavoro. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
31. Le persone che sanno parlare più di una lingua sono intelligenti. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo

(4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
32. Se imparo bene il cinese, avrò molte occasioni di parlarlo e usarlo. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
33. Chiunque può imparare una lingua straniera. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
34. E' più semplice leggere e scrivere in cinese, piuttosto che parlare e capire il cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
35. Le ore settimanali di cinese nel mio corso sono sufficienti per imparare bene la lingua. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
<b>BALLI Plus</b>
36. Voglio imparare a parlare il cinese molto bene. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
37. Voglio imparare a scrivere in cinese molto bene. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
38. Gli studenti dovrebbero partire dal pinyin quando iniziano a studiare cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
39. I caratteri cinesi dovrebbero essere presentati fin dal primo giorno di lezione, insieme al pinyin. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
40. I caratteri cinesi andrebbero presentati dopo circa un mese dall'inizio delle lezioni, in modo che gli studenti abbiano la possibilità di "assaporare" la lingua prima di studiarne i caratteri. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
41. I toni sono l'aspetto più difficile nell'apprendimento del cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo

(4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
42. I caratteri cinesi sono l'aspetto più difficile dell'apprendimento del cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
43. I caratteri cinesi sono l'aspetto più interessante dell'apprendimento del Cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
44. L'apprendimento del cinese consiste principalmente nella capacità di scrivere il maggior numero possibile di caratteri. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
45. Saper riconoscere i caratteri cinesi non significa essere in grado di scriverli. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
46. Imparare il cinese è più difficile che imparare altre lingue, quindi richiede più perseveranza. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
47. Continuerò ad impegnarmi nell'apprendimento del cinese se la metodologia dei miei docenti sarà in linea con le mie opinioni sull'apprendimento e sulla didattica del cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
48. Continuerò ad impegnarmi nell'apprendimento del cinese se otterrò buoni voti in cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
49. Continuerò ad impegnarmi in cinese purché i miei compagni di classe non siano di origine cinese. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo
50. Continuerò ad impegnarmi nell'apprendimento del cinese se i miei compagni di classe ed io partiamo dallo stesso livello linguistico. (1) pienamente d'accordo (2) d'accordo (3) né d'accordo né in disaccordo (4) in disaccordo (5) pienamente in disaccordo

## Appendix III

### Learning Strategy Questionnaire

#### Questionario sulle Strategie di Apprendimento

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Il presente questionario è somministrato ai soli fini di ricerca, le tue risposte saranno strettamente confidenziali.

1. Il tuo anno di corso liceale è:

I    II    III    IV    V

2. La tua media dei voti in Cinese è:

3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

3. Di seguito sono elencate alcune strategie per memorizzare la forma grafica dei caratteri. Ordina per importanza le strategie che utilizzi, contrassegnandole con numeri decrescenti (1: usata sempre, 2: usata spesso, 3: usata a volte, e così via). Puoi indicare tutte le strategie che ritieni di usare. Non indicare le strategie che non usi.

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Memorizzo i componenti grafici dei caratteri (radicali, parti interne, parti esterne...)

b) \_\_\_\_\_ Memorizzo i componenti dei caratteri perché vi associo una storia o un aneddoto

c) \_\_\_\_\_ Scrivo i caratteri più e più volte

d) \_\_\_\_\_ Associo i caratteri nuovi a caratteri vecchi già studiati per aiutare la mia memoria visiva

e) \_\_\_\_\_ Leggo testi e dialoghi regolarmente

- f) \_\_\_\_\_ Creo foglietti con caratteri scritti in grande da consultare quando studio (flashcards)
- g) \_\_\_\_\_ Creo personalmente liste di vocaboli, così da ordinare i termini a mio piacimento
- h) \_\_\_\_\_ Uso software specifici che ho installato sul mio PC (es: Wenlin)
- i) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito su siti Internet gratuiti o a pagamento (es: HSK Academy, YouDao...)
- j) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito con App digitali sul mio smartphone (es: Hello Chinese, Pleco, Huaying...)
- k) Altro (specificare) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Quali sono i caratteri di cui fatichi maggiormente a memorizzare la grafia?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Di seguito sono elencate alcune strategie utili a ricordare la pronuncia dei caratteri. Ordina per importanza le strategie che utilizzi, contrassegnandole con numeri decrescenti (1: usata sempre, 2: usata spesso, 3: usata a volte, e così via). Puoi indicare tutte le strategie che ritieni di usare. Non indicare le strategie che non usi.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi avvalgo dei componenti fonetici (portatori di suono)
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Ascolto con regolarità le registrazioni audio del manuale
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Leggo ripetutamente i caratteri ad alta voce
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ Consulto ripetutamente il pinyin dei caratteri dai glossari del libro
- e) \_\_\_\_\_ Leggo testi e dialoghi regolarmente

- f) \_\_\_\_\_ Creo foglietti con caratteri e relativa pronuncia da consultare quando studio (flashcards)
- g) \_\_\_\_\_ Uso software specifici che ho installato sul mio PC
- h) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito su siti Internet
- i) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito con App digitali sul mio smartphone
- j) Altro (specificare)\_\_\_\_\_

6. Di seguito sono elencate alcune strategie utili a ricordare il significato dei caratteri. Ordina per importanza le strategie che utilizzi, contrassegnandole con numeri decrescenti (1: usata sempre, 2: usata spesso, 3: usata a volte, e così via). Puoi indicare tutte le strategie che ritieni di usare. Non indicare le strategie che non usi.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi aiuto con i componenti semantici (radicali, parti interne, parti esterne)
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi aiuto associando al carattere una storia, un concetto o un aneddoto detto in classe
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Ascolto con regolarità le registrazioni audio del manuale
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ Cerco di memorizzare il significato del carattere nel contesto di utilizzo (frase, discorso...)
- e) \_\_\_\_\_ Leggo testi e dialoghi regolarmente
- f) \_\_\_\_\_ Creo foglietti con caratteri da consultare quando studio (flashcards)
- g) \_\_\_\_\_ Uso software specifici che ho installato sul mio PC
- h) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito su siti Internet
- i) \_\_\_\_\_ Mi esercito con App digitali sul mio smartphone
- j) Altro (specificare)\_\_\_\_\_

7. Quali sono i caratteri di cui fatichi maggiormente a memorizzare il significato?

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8. Le tue strategie di assimilazione (grafia, pronuncia e significato) sono cambiate nel tempo?  SÌ  NO

9. Se sì, cosa/che strategie hai cambiato?

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10. Se sì, perché le hai cambiate?

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11. In base a quali parametri adotti una determinata strategia? (Indica con una X tutto ciò che ritieni appropriato)

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Vado per tentativi finché non trovo la strategia adatta a me

b) \_\_\_\_\_ Scelgo in base al tempo a disposizione

c) \_\_\_\_\_ Scelgo in base alla tipologia di prova da svolgere

d) \_\_\_\_\_ Scelgo in base ai risultati che una strategia mi consente di ottenere rispetto a un'altra

e) \_\_\_\_\_ Scelgo grazie ai consigli dei compagni e dei familiari

f) \_\_\_\_\_ Scelgo grazie ai consigli del docente

g) Altro (specificare)\_\_\_\_\_

12. Sei in grado di valutare se una strategia ti porta a una performance migliore rispetto a un'altra?

SI  NO

13. Quale tra queste è l'abilità in cui ti senti più sicuro di te in cinese? (Indica con una X tutto ciò che ritieni appropriato)

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Comprensione scritta
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Comprensione orale (ascolto)
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Produzione scritta e scrittura
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ Produzione orale
- e) \_\_\_\_\_ Lessico
- f) \_\_\_\_\_ Grammatica
- g) \_\_\_\_\_ Pronuncia
- h) \_\_\_\_\_ Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Quale tra queste è l'abilità nella quale ottieni i risultati migliori in cinese? (Indica con una X tutto ciò che ritieni appropriato)

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Comprensione scritta
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Comprensione orale (ascolto)
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Produzione scritta e scrittura
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ Produzione orale
- e) \_\_\_\_\_ Lessico
- f) \_\_\_\_\_ Grammatica



g) \_\_\_\_\_ Pronuncia

h) \_\_\_\_\_ Altro: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Quale ritieni sia la tua più forte criticità in cinese?

\_\_\_\_\_

Perché?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. Secondo te, che abilità e/o doti deve possedere una persona che intenda studiare il cinese?

\_\_\_\_\_

# PRÉSENTATION DE LA THÈSE EN LANGUE FRANÇAISE

## 1. Introduction

Depuis l'Antiquité, les pays asiatiques et leurs cultures ont toujours exercé une attraction irrésistible sur le monde occidental. Quand on parle de la Chine, par exemple, on plonge dans une atmosphère mystique, et on est submergé par ses réalités aux multiples facettes qui ont fasciné les civilisations occidentales pendant des siècles. La soie, la poterie, les chinoiseries et autres produits sophistiqués ont apporté à l'Occident le parfum d'une culture ancienne qui, à quelques occasions, a franchi les frontières européennes et s'est manifestée de ce côté du monde. Bien qu'encore perçue comme une réalité sociale et géographique très lointaine, l'aura de mystère qui a enveloppé la Chine pendant des siècles s'est presque complètement dissoute à nos yeux aujourd'hui. L'Occident et l'Orient se sont engagés dans de nombreuses missions de coopération qui ont contribué à construire un gigantesque pont culturel, *qiaoliang* (桥梁) comme les Chinois aiment l'appeler. La compréhension mutuelle que les deux cultures ont atteinte ces derniers temps est un fait évident pour tout le monde. Eh bien, nous pensons qu'un rôle clé dans cette réalisation a certainement été joué par l'éducation et la politique linguistique des deux côtés. En particulier, l'enseignement des langues a représenté une impulsion décisive pour combler le fossé culturel entre la Chine et le bloc occidental. Et c'est la bonne éducation aux langues qui nous a poussés plus que d'autres éléments à commencer nos recherches.

De notre point de vue, le chinois langue étrangère (CLE) a la double valence d'être à la fois ancien et jeune. Ancien car il était déjà devenu l'objet de recherche académique et d'enseignement au 19ème siècle en Europe, et a gagné au fil des années une reconnaissance de plus en plus institutionnelle et une position solide dans l'enseignement supérieur et secondaire. D'un autre côté, il peut également être vu comme une discipline relativement jeune si on le considère du point de

vue de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage, puisque ses processus, approches et méthodes sont dans une phase de construction en cours en Occident. Cette condition dualiste et fascinante nous a poussé à nous intéresser à la dimension pédagogique du CLE au point d'en faire l'objet de toute notre étude. Nous avons décidé d'explorer les facteurs qui ont dénoté et connoté le statut d'enseignant du CLE jusqu'à sa forme actuelle. On croit que la façon la plus globale et la plus claire d'aborder ce thème est de comparer les expériences de deux contextes socioculturels différents mais proches, dans lesquels le CLE a s'est transformé en une discipline et a acquis une position standardisée. Cette opportunité a été fournie par l'Italie et la France. D'un côté, l'Italie représente un contexte très familier pour faire avancer nos pas, notamment parce qu'elle est le pays d'origine de l'auteur; de plus, l'Italie a été le théâtre d'une évolution dynamique des approches d'enseignement du CLE dans les dernières décennies (dans l'enseignement secondaire notamment), dont les méthodes et les politiques ont été partiellement empruntées du modèle français. En parallèle, la France représente un autre champ d'investigation fructueux pour l'expérience plus longue et plus mouvementée que le CLE a vécu depuis le début du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Une expérience qui, s'étendant de l'académie aux niveaux inférieurs de l'enseignement, a pris différentes formes au fil des années et a souvent représenté une forte source d'inspiration et de référence pour l'évolution des perspectives pédagogiques dans les pays voisins. Une autre raison essentielle qui nous pousse à étendre la recherche aux deux pays cibles est le substrat socioculturel commun et la proximité linguistique des chercheurs, enseignants et apprenants par rapport à l'objet de notre analyse.

Notre recherche vise à explorer et comparer les approches méthodologiques qui ont influencé et déterminé la constitution de la philosophie et des pratiques pédagogiques du CLE en France et en Italie au cours des deux derniers siècles. Une attention particulière a été portée aux facteurs historiques, aux poussées socioculturelles, aux politiques linguistiques, aux techniques et matériels

pédagogiques qui ont orienté la ligne évolutive du CLE et contribué à définir son statut disciplinaire et institutionnel. On a essayé d'équilibrer l'analyse des éléments théoriques et pratiques de l'enseignement du CLE, en explorant d'abord les différentes perspectives méthodologiques applicables à l'enseignement des langues vivantes, puis en se concentrant sur les principales approches ayant directement influencé les manuels du CLE. Notre étude comprend deux sections principales: la première se concentre sur le cadre théorique, le contexte historique et la dimension institutionnelle du CLE. Elle se développe en trois sous-sections, dont la première examine l'état actuel du CLE en Europe, la deuxième et la troisième analysent respectivement les figures et les phases historiques qui ont marqué l'évolution du CLE en France et en Italie. La deuxième section est consacrée à une analyse plus approfondie des approches, des méthodes et des matériaux du CLE. Elle s'articule en quatre sous-sections, dont la première examine les acteurs et les facteurs impliqués dans les processus de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage, la deuxième explore trois approches méthodologiques importantes de la pédagogie des langues vivantes, le troisième explore plusieurs méthodes applicables à la pratique de l'enseignement du CLE et fournit une analyse contrastive de l'influence méthodologique sur les manuels, enfin la dernière présente un cas d'étude et une panoramique des pratiques pédagogiques appliquées au CLE.

## **2. Disciplinarisation, institutionnalisation et standardisation**

Le début du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle témoigne une explosion d'intérêt pour les langues asiatiques dans le monde entier. En particulier, le chinois moderne a acquis une position de relief dans plusieurs contextes éducatifs, principalement dans les universités, les écoles secondaires et les collèges. Malgré son introduction récente dans de nombreux systèmes éducatifs, le chinois est devenu la première langue non européenne étudiée dans les programmes du secondaire et dans les cours universitaires. En se concentrant sur les pays cibles de notre étude, l'enquête statistique publiée en 2015 par J. Bellassen révèle que la langue

chinoise est la cinquième langue la plus étudiée dans l'enseignement secondaire français, comptant plus de 100.000 apprenants de tous niveaux et près de 600 enseignants. En Italie, le Ministère de l'éducation, de l'université et de la recherche (MIUR) a publié les premières données sur les tendances de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage du chinois en 2017, révélant une réalité inattendue. Quelques années à peine après son introduction dans le système, le nombre de cours de chinois a presque doublé le nombre de cours de russe, comptant jusqu'à 189 classes dans l'enseignement secondaire public et 70 chaires correspondantes.

Plusieurs chercheurs se sont interrogés sur la nature ambiguë du mot «discipline», tel qu'il peut être trouvé dans des contextes très diversifiés, portant parfois des connotations différentes. Du point de vue des chercheurs et des universitaires, le sens conventionnel de ce mot tend à se rapporter davantage à l'enseignement supérieur qu'à l'enseignement secondaire, sans clarifier les limites entre la spécialité scientifique confinée dans une dimension académique et la matière scolaire. Laissant de côté le caractère ambigu de la «discipline», ce qui ressort des différentes définitions épistémologiques considérées jusqu'à présent, c'est que toute organisation de la discipline vise à mettre en place un cadre «socio-technique» dans lequel les connaissances sont transformées en unités opérationnelles. Mais la connaissance est une matière vivante qui se transforme et évolue constamment, la *disciplinarisation* est le seul moyen de la stabiliser et de créer une base pour sa diffusion et son application. Ce processus se concentre sur les éléments constitutifs de chaque discipline mais considère également leurs modifications potentielles dues à l'évolution institutionnelle.

Dans notre cas, il est important de préciser si l'enseignement du CLE est ou non une discipline distincte de la langue chinoise elle-même. En Europe, les langues étrangères étaient enseignées de la même manière que toute autre matière, les étudiants ne devaient qu'acquérir des contenus, qui pouvaient être convertis en capacités dans un second temps. En d'autres termes, la phonologie, le lexique et

la grammaire étaient enseignés comme des anneaux séparés du même processus, c'était le travail des apprenants de les mettre ensemble et d'essayer de les convertir en compétences pragmatiques. Avec l'introduction des nouvelles approches pédagogiques aux langues vivantes, l'objectif principal de la pratique pédagogique est devenu l'acquisition de compétences spécifiques, telles que la compréhension (orale et écrite) et la production (orale et écrite). Tant en Italie qu'en France, la langue chinoise a officiellement commencé à être enseignée à l'université au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Les cours ont été conçus pour donner aux étudiants la capacité de lire des textes classiques et de ne pas parler la langue moderne: les apprenants étaient pour la plupart des adultes alphabétisés et des experts d'autres secteurs, les professeurs étaient souvent spécialisés dans les langues anciennes et adoptaient une méthodologie classique plus applicable aux langues mortes, comme le grec ou le latin. Ce n'est qu'après la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale que les CLE a commencé à apparaître dans plusieurs universités françaises et italiennes, et a être enseigné à travers une approche conforme au paradigme humaniste européen. À la fin des années 1970, la consolidation des relations diplomatiques et économiques avec la Chine, l'idée de niveaux de compétence pour l'acquisition des langues européennes et, finalement, la diffusion des programmes de mobilité internationale ont radicalement changé l'approche au CLE, donnant nouvelle importance aux compétences d'écriture, d'expression orale et d'écoute.

En Europe et aux Etats-Unis les cours de chinois étaient traditionnellement intégrés aux programmes de sinologie des universités. Cette première collocation a sans doute déterminé les premières étapes de l'enseignement du CLE: en fait, l'approche didactique dominante dans la plupart des universités a été fortement influencé par la tradition humaniste européenne. Le soi-disant «paradigme classique», adopté au cours des siècles pour l'analyse de la littérature ancienne et particulièrement fonctionnel aux langues mortes, a été étendu à toutes les pratiques didactiques appliquées aux langues étrangères jusqu'à la fin des années

1980. La langue chinoise était enseignée de la même manière que le latin, le grec ou le sanscrit; cet approche, en fait, consistait à traduire des textes littéraires et des essais diplomatiques écrits en chinois classique. Cette situation est restée inchangée dans toute l'Europe pendant tout le 19ème siècle. Aujourd'hui, on peut observer que la principale méthodologie didactique du CLE dans les universités européennes est extrêmement hybride, c'est-à-dire qu'elle tend à fusionner des éléments appartenant à différentes approches. De plus, des facteurs tels que l'articulation des cours, l'adoption de stratégies et d'outils pédagogiques particuliers, le choix de manuels spécifiques et l'exposition aux enseignants de langue maternelle ont contribué à une forte diversification de la communauté enseignante du CLE, en particulier au niveau universitaire. Contrairement à cette réalité, les écoles secondaires sont soumises *de facto* à des politiques au niveau ministériel, elles s'en tiennent aux programmes nationaux déterminant les contenus et les niveaux de compétence, elles ont tendance à coordonner les efforts pour garantir l'atteinte des résultats standards. L'ensemble de ces conditions nous a conduits à penser que le secondaire représente un contexte normalisé, capable d'assurer la stabilité épistémologique, l'homogénéité territoriale et, donc, l'institutionnalisation d'une discipline. Pour cela, on identifie le début du processus d'institutionnalisation du CLE avec l'introduction de cette matière dans l'enseignement secondaire.

L'enseignement des langues étrangères en Italie et en France, bien qu'ayant évolué dans des directions assez différentes, a subi des pressions et des influences similaires. Parmi les différentes mesures adoptées au niveau européen, l'instrument qui s'est démontré le plus efficace dans le panorama des politiques linguistiques contemporaines est le CERC. Près de 20 ans après sa publication en 2001, le CECR est disponible dans 40 langues différentes et représente l'un des moyens politiques les plus connus et les plus utilisés pour l'éducation linguistique. Un tel engagement dans la politique linguistique a commencé comme un moyen de garantir la compréhension internationale, de promouvoir l'apprentissage tout

au long de la vie et d'améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement des langues dans l'école. On doit remarquer toutefois que ces politiques ont été initialement conçues exclusivement pour les langues européennes, flexibles et alphabétiques. Un débat ouvert consiste à savoir si ces politiques peuvent ou non être appliquées également au chinois et, si elles le peuvent, dans quelle mesure de compatibilité. La question, abordée par plusieurs communautés académiques en Europe et en Chine, concerne deux aspects principaux: d'un côté la morphologie, la phonologie et la syntaxe particulières de la langue chinoise qui affectent directement le temps d'apprentissage et les résultats d'acquisition, en particulier dans les pays européens; de l'autre, la capacité d'évaluer la maîtrise de la langue chinoise avec les mêmes critères adoptés pour les langues européennes, indépendamment de l'écart interlinguistique, de la distance typologique et des divergences dans l'approche méthodologique. Au cours des deux dernières décennies, une réponse partielle à ce débat a été apportée par le HSK et, plus partiellement, par le projet EBCL. Le HSK (汉语水平考试, *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*) est un test standardisé de maîtrise de la langue chinoise, administré par Hanban spécialement conçu pour les locuteurs non natifs et les Chinois d'outre-mer. Sa première phase de développement a commencé à l'Université des langues et de la culture de Pékin en 1984, et en 1992 le test a finalement été normalisé et publié hors de Chine continentale. Selon les critères standard de Hanban, le test est uniquement administré en chinois standard (普通话 *Pǔtōnghuà*), écrit en caractères simplifiés (简体字 *jiǎntǐzì*), bien que les candidats qui passent le test sur papier peuvent également utiliser les caractères traditionnels. Le test est conçu pour évaluer trois compétences distinctes, respectivement la compréhension orale (听力理解 *tīnglì lǐjiě*), la compréhension écrite (阅读理解 *yuèdú lǐjiě*) et, à partir du niveau 3, également la capacité d'écriture (书写 *shūxiě*). Un premier point controversé concerne l'absence de la production orale, qui est traitée dans un test séparé, le HSKK, dont les trois niveaux de compétence (débutant, intermédiaire et avancé) correspondent par paires aux six niveaux administrés en HSK. Un deuxième aspect encore plus débattu est la



correspondance entre les niveaux HSK et les niveaux CECR. L'équivalence HSK-CECR élaborée par Hanban et incluse dans le programme officiel du HSK, établit une correspondance biunivoque directe entre les six niveaux de compétence HSK et les six niveaux de compétence du CECR. Toutefois, au cours de la dernière décennie, certaines communautés d'enseignants de langue chinoise ont remis en question cette équivalence, notamment en raison des différentes approches d'évaluation approuvées par le cadre européen et Hanban. Les écarts majeurs concernent les habilités testées, les critères d'évaluation, les descripteurs de niveau de compétence, ainsi que la tendance à s'en tenir aux listes de vocabulaire et au nombre des caractères comme principe fondamental pour évaluer la compétence linguistique.

### **3. L'évolution du CLE en France**

Dans la première moitié du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la Chine et la langue chinoise n'étaient plus les réalités mystérieuses décrites par Marco Polo 500 ans auparavant. Plus précisément, en France, le premier fragment de la langue chinoise remonte au 16<sup>ème</sup> siècle et, depuis lors, l'intérêt commun n'a cessé de croître. La connaissance de la Chine et de la langue chinoise est passée par plusieurs phases de développement. La première se situe au milieu du 16<sup>ème</sup> siècle, et a été marquée par l'apparition des premiers dictionnaires et grammaires compilés par des missionnaires portugais, italiens et espagnols. Le siècle suivant a vu la création de la «Mission Française», qui a littéralement déclenché un débat fort et assez long autour des rituels chinois (Querelle des rites) où les chercheurs ont débattu des questions éthiques et morales liées à la culture chinoise. C'est exactement au cours de ces décennies que plusieurs articles et publications « exotiques » dans des langues inconnues importés d'Asie ont suscité l'intérêt du public pour la sphère chinoise. Malgré le fort intérêt pour la culture chinoise, la France n'a pu institutionnaliser l'enseignement du chinois qu'au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle et, depuis, le gouvernement a en quelque sorte garanti sa continuité au sein de son système éducatif national. Pour aborder l'analyse de l'évolution du CLE en

France, on a considéré la création de trois chaires académiques entre 1814 et 1913 comme le fait que plus que tout autre a déclenché l'institutionnalisation de l'enseignement du chinois en contexte français, qui sont, dans l'ordre: celle attribuée à Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, créée au Collège de France en 1814 et intitulée «Langue et littérature chinoises et tartares-mandchoues»; celle en «Chinois vulgaire» attribuée en 1843 à Antoine Bazin à l'Ecole spéciale des langues orientales vivantes; enfin celle créée à l'Université de Lyon en 1913, où le premier professeur titulaire était Maurice Courant.

Depuis sa fondation en 1530, le Collège de France a accueilli plusieurs disciplines normalement rejetées par les universités ordinaires, comme les langues et les cultures exotiques. Le nombre de disciplines enseignées au Collège a augmenté assez rapidement, à la fin du 18<sup>ème</sup> siècle en fait, l'institution comptait plus de vingt chaires, comprenant aussi quelques langues asiatiques (turc, persan et syriaque) qui ont fait leur première apparition dans le plan d'offre académique en 1538. Parmi les différents domaines de recherche, deux nouveaux domaines ont rejoint officiellement le programme du Collège en 1814: le sanscrit et le chinois, dont les chaires ont été respectivement conférées à L. de Chézy et J. Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832). Il est communément considéré le fondateur de la «sinologie scientifique» (Le Blanc, 2007), il a été un grand philologue et le premier professeur titulaire de langue chinoise dans les systèmes éducatifs européens. Les facteurs qui ont le plus contribué à définir sa vision originale de la relation entre la langue et l'écriture sont deux: d'un côté, sa maîtrise des langues européennes et de la philologie, de l'autre, sa connaissance de certaines langues asiatiques, comme le japonais, le coréen et surtout, le chinois. Abel-Rémusat avait appris le chinois par lui-même, faisant de gros efforts pour atteindre certains résultats, l'un de ses plus grands regrets était en fait de ne pas avoir eu la chance de s'initier au chinois par la «méthode naturelle». Depuis sa première publication sur le chinois, *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoise* (1811), il a souligné l'urgence d'une méthode rationnelle dans l'apprentissage du

chinois. D'après cette publication, on peut déduire trois propositions essentielles sur sa vision de la nature de la langue chinoise: la première est que le chinois est une langue naturelle, produit de la société et de la culture; la deuxième est que le chinois est une langue cohérente, ayant sa propre grammaire; la troisième est que le chinois est une langue polysyllabique et que son écriture repose sur des unités monosyllabiques. Au cours de ses recherches, Abel-Rémusat a réfuté à plusieurs reprises la croyance d'une apparition mythologique de caractères chinois, à l'inverse, il a déclaré que tout code d'écriture est le fruit du processus de civilisation et suit l'évolution humaine, en fait, la particularité de l'écriture chinoise ne l'empêche pas d'être aussi malléable, opérationnelle et pratique que d'autres systèmes naturels. Surtout dans le domaine des langues étrangères, Abel-Rémusat soutient que l'apprentissage d'une langue favorise le développement de l'intelligence humaine, élargit la vision humaine du monde et, dans le cas d'une langue lointaine, cela permet également d'apprécier une autre culture. La langue est un instrument pour façonner sa pensée, une sorte de «gymnastique culturelle» visant à enrichir les connaissances des gens. La méthodologie à appliquer à l'étude chinoise devait d'abord s'en tenir à la nature et au but de l'objet d'enseignement. Premièrement, il avait tendance à faire la distinction entre les moyens et les méthodes que les missionnaires avaient adoptés au cours des siècles précédents et ceux dont disposaient les lettrés européens à son époque. Deuxièmement, il a plaidé pour une approche analytique, qui consistait à expliquer aux étudiants les principes de la langue chinoise et de son écriture, sans favoriser directement la pratique de la langue. Dans ses cours, il propose principalement des exercices de lecture et de traduction, des essais, des mémoires et des recherches autonomes (Abel-Rémusat, «Programme du cours de langue et de littérature chinoises et tartare-mandchou», 1815), construisant ainsi une pratique pédagogique beaucoup plus proche au domaine littéraire qu'au domaine linguistique.

Antoine Pierre Louis Bazin (1799 - 1862) avait été l'élève d'Abel-Rémusat au Collège de France. Par la suite, il s'est spécialisé dans le théâtre Yuan et est devenu le premier professeur titulaire de langue chinoise à l'École des langues orientales en 1843, bien que les cours de chinois aient déjà commencé deux ans auparavant. Au cours de la dernière décennie de sa vie, il a eu la chance de devenir une référence pour ce qui concernait les langues asiatiques en Europe occidentale, dans la mesure où il a initié plusieurs chercheurs étrangers à l'étude de la langue chinoise. ). Basant la plupart de ses théories sur les décrets de l'empereur Kangxi, Bazin a déduit la coexistence en Chine de différentes variétés linguistiques, deux en particulier: d'un côté, il y avait ce qu'il appelait la «langue savante» (书话, *shūhuà*, signifiant littéralement «langue des livres») qui représentait le code écrit chinois référencé dans sa «Grammaire Mandarine» (1856). De l'autre côté, il y avait la «langue vulgaire» (俗话, *súhuà*), la langue spontanée réellement utilisée dans la communication quotidienne des Chinois. Ces deux définitions sont en quelque sorte équivalentes aux notions modernes de chinois classique (文言 *wényán*) et de chinois vernaculaire (白话 *báihuà*). Lors de la rédaction de sa grammaire, Bazin a d'abord adopté le point de vue d'Abel-Rémusat, en fait il ne croyait pas à une essence polysyllabique de la langue, il pensait que si le chinois était observé d'un point de vue phonétique, il serait principalement composé de constituants polysyllabiques ou disyllabiques. Sur la base de cette position, Bazin a identifié deux approches des notions de «mot»: l'une issue du langage écrit, l'autre issue du langage parlé. Selon lui, l'enseignement de la langue chinoise montre un double intérêt pour l'esprit humain: d'un côté il satisfait la curiosité naturelle d'une autre civilisation, de l'autre il permet la maîtrise d'une langue différente. Les approches et les outils pédagogiques doivent donc être choisis sur la base de ces deux orientations intellectuelles. Bien que la politique menée à l'École des langues orientales favorise une approche pragmatique de l'enseignement des langues, particulièrement fonctionnelle pour les hommes politiques et les commerçants, les cours de Bazin sont essentiellement théoriques et se déroulent principalement

en français. Il n'avait eu aucune chance de pratiquer le chinois en Chine, il ne connaissait la langue qu'à travers les œuvres scientifiques et littéraires qu'il avait lues pendant ses études. Ce fait a directement affecté la méthodologie d'enseignement de Bazin, qui n'a pas pu surmonter le paradigme traditionnel consistant en explications grammaticales et traduction de textes classiques.

Tout au long du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Paris détenait le monopole de toute la sinologie française, accueillant deux institutions supérieures prestigieuses dotées chacune d'une chaire de langue chinoise. Mais au début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les études chinoises ont commencé à se répandre dans les banlieues. Grâce au soutien financier de Paul Doumer, gouverneur général d'Indochine, et grâce à l'apport de la Chambre de commerce de Lyon, un cours d'études chinoises a été institué en 1903 à l'Université de Lyon, jetant les bases de la première chaire universitaire de Langue et civilisation chinoises hors de la capitale. La première chaire a été donnée à Maurice Courant en 1913 peu après son diplôme du ministère de l'Éducation publique et des Beaux-Arts. Arts. Dans ses ouvrages les plus pertinents concernant la langue chinoise «De la lecture japonaise des textes contenant uniquement ou principalement des caractères idéographiques» (1897), «L'enseignement du chinois à Lyon» (1901), «La langue chinoise parlée: grammaire du Kwan Hwa septentrional » (1913) il semble que les cours de Courant aient été conçus à mi-chemin entre la langue et la culture. Sa démarche s'inscrit dans la mission pragmatique de l'Université de Lyon, qui poursuit principalement des objectifs coloniaux, elle conçoit ses cours pour donner aux étudiants un aperçu de la civilisation et de la société chinoises et tend à leur enseigner des notions pratiques pour la vie en Chine. Selon les registres officiels, les étudiants de Courant étaient extrêmement diversifiés, comprenant des étudiants de l'École de commerce, des comptables, des commis, des étudiants du baccalauréat en sciences humaines, des enseignants du secondaire, des officiers à la retraite et des étudiants étrangers. Cela a sans aucun doute introduit un changement important dans le statut de l'apprentissage de la langue chinoise: il

est progressivement passé d'une discipline spécialisée à une matière ordinaire. Cependant, l'approche de Courant n'était pas très éloignée de celle adoptée dans la capitale: sa leçon reposait principalement sur l'exposition de la grammaire et l'explication de textes, et elles étaient souvent suivies de séances axées sur la pratique des «phrases usuelles». Les activités qu'il proposait incluaient la pratique orale, l'explication de dialogues, des essais et des versions écrites («L'enseignement du chinois à Lyon», 1901), qui ne s'écartaient pas vraiment de la méthodologie traditionnelle basée sur la grammaire et la traduction. Les supports matériels à l'utilisation des élèves à l'époque - grammaire et manuel - n'étaient pas totalement satisfaisants, ils étaient souvent jugés vagues, peu clairs et non progressifs pour un cycle d'apprentissage naturel.

Comme indiqué précédemment, la langue chinoise était une discipline exclusivement enseignée au niveau universitaire en France jusqu'aux premières décennies du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle, elle n'a commencé à se répandre dans l'enseignement secondaire qu'après la seconde moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle, précisément en 1954. Le système scolaire secondaire a dû faire face à certains défis pédagogiques et répondre aux besoins éducatifs: quels aspects de la langue chinoise devraient devenir des connaissances communes? À quels objectifs faut-il s'attendre à la fin de tout cycle d'études? Comment le temps d'apprentissage typique devrait-il s'adapter au rythme d'acquisition de la langue chinoise? Cet ensemble de réflexions a d'abord émergé du milieu de l'enseignement secondaire, puis s'est étendu à une approche plus générale de l'enseignement du chinois, et a finalement conduit à la naissance de la didactique moderne du CLE en France. La théorie basée sur les caractères (字本位 *zìběnwèi*), largement discutée en Chine et soutenue par un groupe de linguistes chinois comme le «hanzi-ologiste» Xu Tongqiang, fait son apparition en France à la fin des années 1980. Aujourd'hui la langue chinoise résulte une matière éligible dans seulement 6 pays européens sur 32, ce chiffre indique une promotion encore insuffisante et une faible valorisation d'une réelle diversité linguistique, contrairement à ce qui a

été poursuivi par le Conseil de l'Europe et l'Union européenne. En France, la propagation de la langue chinoise dans l'enseignement public est passée par plusieurs phases, sous l'impulsion des pressions nationales et géopolitiques différentes. On constate que la première phase remonte à la fin des années 1950, lorsque le lycée Montgeron à Paris a ouvert la «première implantation d'un enseignement chinois dans un établissement secondaire occidental». Quelques années plus tard, un autre jalon est franchi dans le processus d'institutionnalisation du CLE: la création du premier CAPES en langue chinoise en 1966. Une décennie après, en 1977, Robert Ruhlmann a pris la responsabilité de la mission IGEN pour la langue chinoise et a commencé à rationaliser les contenus du CLE et son cadre d'enseignement. La plupart de progrès dans l'institutionnalisation du CLE ont été réalisés quelques années plus tard, en 1985, quand la première équipe de recherche sur l'enseignement du CLE a été nommée au nom de l'INRP. Cette équipe était en fait chargée de poursuivre un travail systématique sur les contenus disciplinaires et la méthodologie pédagogique du CLE en milieu scolaire secondaire. Les efforts conjoints ont abouti à la création du Seuil Minimum de Caractères (SMIC), conçu et élaboré par J. Bellassen et F. Audry-Iljic, dans le cadre de l'Institut National de la Recherche Pédagogique. «Méthode d'initiation à la langue et à l'écriture chinoise» a été en fait le premier manuel méthodologiquement basé sur le concept du SMIC, publié en 1989 par J. Bellassen et P. Zhang. Il représentait une véritable rupture épistémologique avec tous les manuels précédents, son approche pédagogique inédite basée sur les caractères et non sur la progression grammaticale (approche largement utilisée pour les langues européennes ) ou des listes de mots (approche chinoise continentale) a ouvert la voie à l'école française d'enseignement de la langue chinoise.

#### **4. L'évolution du CLE en Italie**

Quelqu'un peut croire que l'intérêt pour la langue et la culture chinoises n'est autre qu'un phénomène nouveau et bizarre apporté en Italie par les vagues de

migration et le processus de mondialisation. Cependant, une inspection plus approfondie peut révéler que ce n'est pas simplement le cas. Le nombre constant d'étudiants qui s'inscrivent chaque année à des cours de chinois dans les universités et dans les instituts privés montre clairement à quel point il est important pour de nombreux Italiens d'entrer en contact et de comprendre une dimension culturelle et linguistique si lointaine. Bien que l'analyse quantitative des apprenants chinois en Italie se réfère principalement aux trois ou quatre dernières décennies, la tâche d'enseigner le chinois n'est pas complètement nouvelle dans notre pays. En fait, elle trouve ses origines au début du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, où les événements historiques ont profondément marqué les théories et les pratiques pédagogiques. C'est l'époque où, d'un côté, des ouvrages pionniers en anglais décrivant et méprisant les coutumes chinoises ont commencé à être publiés et à circuler à travers l'Europe; de l'autre, la nouvelle école française de sinologie a commencé à examiner la culture et la littérature chinoises et à explorer les premières approches de l'enseignement de la langue. Sous la brise apportée par les chercheurs britanniques et français, un bon nombre de chercheurs italiens ont également abordé les études chinoises.

Selon les archives officiels, l'Université de Pavie a été la première université italienne ouvertement consacrée à l'orientalisme. En effet, il a activé un cours de langue chinoise dès 1806, chargeant Joseph Hager (1757-1819) comme conférencier officiel. Hager était un universitaire germano-italien qui, après avoir terminé ses études supérieures à Vienne, Rome et Paris, a commencé sa carrière universitaire dans le domaine des études arabes et, après, est devenu spécialiste de la langue et de la culture chinoises. La deuxième université italienne à s'intéresser aux langues asiatiques a été l'Université de Pise, où Giuseppe Bardelli (1815-1865) a d'abord été nommé assistant de la chaire des langues d'Asie en 1843, puis, par un décret du 19 février 1849, a couvert une chaire vacante de copte, de sanskrit et des fondamentaux du chinois. Cela souligne comme d'habitude pour la plupart des savants du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les professeurs de chinois



à l'époque étaient souvent spécialisés dans un assez large éventail de domaines pas toujours interconnectés.

L'institut qui a créé la première chaire ordinaire des langues d'Extrême-Orient a été l'Istituto di Studi Superiori de Florence en 1864 et en a confié la pleine responsabilité à Antelmo Severini (1828-1909), premier élève de Bardelli. Severini avait une connaissance approfondie du latin, du grec et de certaines langues étrangères, il était également un fin expert en droit et en philosophie du droit. Pour ses réalisations dans ces domaines, il est d'abord devenu professeur de statistique et de géographie à l'Université de Macerata, où il a ensuite été promu doyen de la faculté et professeur d'anglais à l'Istituto di Studi Superiori de Florence, en 1870. Grâce à une subvention du ministère de l'Éducation publique, Severini s'est installé à Paris et s'est lancé dans l'étude de deux langues asiatiques: le chinois, sous la tutelle de Stanislas Julien et Antoine Pierre Louis Bazin, et le japonais, sous la direction de Léon de Rosny. Severini, ainsi, fasciné par les mécanismes des langues lointaines et compétent dans l'acquisition de caractères, a demandé et obtenu une prolongation de sa bourse pour continuer à étudier les langues asiatiques à Paris pendant une autre année. Peu de temps après son retour, Severini reçut la chaire extraordinaire des Langues d'Extrême-Orient en 1868. Il a été en charge pendant l'âge d'or de l'Istituto di Studi Superiori, en fait, à la suite des premières relations diplomatiques entre l'Italie et en Extrême-Orient, l'Istituto a encouragé l'introduction d'études comparatives euro-asiatiques, en particulier dans le domaine de la politique et de l'histoire.

Un autre étape essentielle pour le développement du CLE en Italie est représentée par le Collegio de 'Cinesi de Naples, à l'origine une institution secondaire née pour accueillir les jeunes chinois et les éduquer au christianisme, afin qu'ils puissent répandre le culte une fois de retour en Chine. Vers la fin des années 1870, le Collegio, conscient de l'importance des relations commerciales avec les puissances étrangères, est devenu un lieu où les jeunes apprenants italiens pouvaient étudier les langues asiatiques et mettre en œuvre une politique

commerciale florissante. C'est en 1868 que le Collegio a changé son nom en Real Collegio Asiatico, et a lancé des cours non conventionnels de chinois littéraire et vulgaire, arabe, turc, persan et hindi. Une caractéristique assez étonnante qui différenciait le Collegio des autres était la présence d'enseignants de langue maternelle, comme Wang Zuocai (connu sous le nom de Francesco Saverio Wang) et Guo Dongchen (connu sous le nom de Giuseppe Maria Guo). En 1914, la chaire vacante à Naples a été attribuée à Guido Amedeo Vitale (1872-1918), interprète de la légation italienne à Pékin. Contrairement à Nocentini, Vitale a été très apprécié pour ses compétences linguistiques et son attitude diplomatique; selon les déclarations officielles de l'ambassadeur italien Daniele Varé, Vitale s'est avéré être l'un des meilleurs sinologues chinois de tous les temps.

Restant toujours dans la zone centre-sud du pays, on a vérifié que la langue chinoise est apparue pour la première fois à l'Université de Rome en 1876, année au cours de laquelle Carlo Valenziani (1831-1896) a obtenu la chaire des langues et littératures de l'Asie de l'Est. Peu après sa mort, le rôle est passé entre les mains de Lodovico Nocentini (1849-1910), qui a été sans aucun doute un pivot essentiel du développement des études chinoises dans notre pays. Il a été nommé professeur ordinaire à Rome en 1899 par décret royal et a immédiatement commencé à collaborer à la création de la «Scuola Orientale dell'Università di Roma» et, plus tard, à la fondation de la revue «Rivista di Studi Orientali ». Sa maîtrise de la langue chinoise était sans doute plus élevée et plus structurée que celle de ses collègues, principalement parce qu'il a profité de son expérience directe en Extrême-Orient. En fait, il a passé deux ans en Chine, passant des zones côtières à l'arrière-pays, confronté aux difficultés d'une langue aussi hostile et de ses variantes dialectales presque incompréhensibles. Sa passion et sa profonde compétence l'ont poussé à enseigner hors du milieu académique également, il était en fait directeur des cours de langues et cultures asiatiques à l'Institut italien pour le Moyen et l'Extrême-Orient (IsMEO), aujourd'hui transformé en Institut Italien pour l'Afrique et l'Orient.

En se rapprochant de l'ère contemporaine, au milieu des années 1990, les professeurs italiens de langue et de littérature chinoises étaient 15: six à Naples, quatre à Venise et un à Turin, Milan, Bologne, Pérouse et Rome. Par rapport à la première période d'après-guerre, les établissements proposant des cours de chinois étaient de plus en plus nombreux et beaucoup plus répandus dans le pays, et le nombre d'étudiants inscrits aux programmes de chinois était bien supérieur à 1000. En ce moment, dans presque toutes les régions il y a au moins une université qui a investi dans les programmes chinois. Au-delà des universités déjà analysées, un autre centre académique remarquable, qui s'est distingué par son dynamisme et ses investissements croissants dans les études asiatiques depuis la seconde moitié du 20ème siècle, est l'Université Ca 'Foscari, à Venise. Fondée en 1868 par décret royal, elle a toujours été consacrée au commerce et aux études commerciales, ce n'est qu'en 1965 que le cours en langues et littératures asiatiques a été activé au sein de la nouvelle faculté des langues et littératures étrangères.

Si l'enseignement secondaire français accueillait déjà le chinois parmi ses disciplines depuis 1954, l'introduction du CLE dans les lycées italiens est un phénomène beaucoup plus récent. La première réforme favorisant le dynamisme scolaire et la personnalisation des programmes d'études a été le D.L. 59/97, la soi-disant loi sur «l'autonomie scolaire», qui avait été conçue quelques années auparavant mais n'est entrée en vigueur qu'en 1997/98. Le pas formel et décisif sur ce chemin tortueux a finalement été franchi le 23 janvier 2008 par la ministre de l'Éducation Maria S. Gelmini, qui a annoncé que la langue chinoise serait éventuellement testée lors de la prochaine session d'examen final (comparable au Baccalauréat). Les expériences probablement les plus réussies en termes d'enseignement du chinois dans l'enseignement secondaire ont été poursuivies par trois régions qui ont d'abord conçu et financé le lancement de programmes de chinois dans les lycées: la Lombardie, la Vénétie et le Latium. La diffusion des cours de CLE à l'échelle nationale n'est pas le seul paramètre significatif pour

explorer les progrès quantitatifs de la langue chinoise dans les environnements éducatifs. Comme on peut facilement l'imaginer, le chinois ne peut être comparé à aucune des quatre langues européennes les plus étudiées (anglais, français, espagnol et allemand), dont le statut est à la fois bien structuré et très consolidé grâce à une assez longue histoire didactique dans notre pays. Il peut cependant être comparé à d'autres langues émergentes nouvellement introduites: il est assez impressionnant de voir par exemple que les cours de chinois en 2017 ont presque doublé le nombre de cours de russe, alors que ce dernier avait été introduit dans le système scolaire italien plus de 10 ans avant que le chinois ne fasse sa première apparition. La situation du recrutement des enseignants est devenue plus stable après l'année 2013/14 et plus tard, après 2015/16 lorsque le gouvernement italien à travers le D.M. 139/11 et sa modification D.M. 81/13 a lancé deux cycles sélectifs de programmes nationaux, appelés TFA, par lesquels des dizaines d'enseignants en herbe ont obtenu pour la première fois une qualification nationale en enseignement de la langue chinoise pour l'école secondaire. Les enseignants nouvellement qualifiés ont ensuite été placés dans des classements régionaux et ont pris part aux processus de sélection suivants pour le recrutement du personnel enseignant.

La diffusion du CLE dans tout le système scolaire italien a en fait remis en question la manière de remodeler et de programmer certaines techniques d'enseignement innovantes, en tenant compte des connaissances préalables potentielles des apprenants et de la possibilité de passer des périodes d'études courtes ou longues directement en Chine. Peu de temps après que la «Conférence nationale sur la didactique de la langue et de la culture chinoises dans les écoles secondaires» s'est tenue les 7 et 8 septembre 2015, un groupe de travail a été formé pour élaborer conjointement une série de contenus adaptés aux programmes du secondaire. Le groupe a passé un an à éditer le contenu et à le compiler dans un Syllabus national, qui a finalement été publié par le MIUR dans un format expérimental à la fin de 2016. Une autre question souvent débattue que

le groupe a essayé de résoudre était le rôle pertinent du vocabulaire dans le processus d'acquisition du CLE. Dans le but de définir le nombre de mots à acquérir chaque année et de fournir aux enseignants un guide lexical clair pour la préparation de l'épreuve finale, le groupe a élaboré une liste de mots divisée en cinq blocs correspondant aux cinq années. L'approche utilisée pour rédiger la liste est basée sur les mots (词本位 *cíběnwèi*), modèle pédagogique adopté à la fois en Chine et à l'étranger, développé comme une alternative à la théorie basée sur les caractères (字本位), diffusée dans l'école secondaire française depuis la fin des années 1980.

## **5. Figures essentielles du processus**

Pendant des siècles, l'essence de l'enseignement repose sur la nature et les rôles de trois composantes et leurs relations: l'apprenant, l'enseignant et la matière. Dans une représentation traditionnelle de ce jeu de rôles, l'apprenant et le sujet (dans notre cas précis, la langue et sa culture) sont en équilibre, et c'est entre eux deux que s'effectue l'interaction principale, aboutissant à l'acquisition. Ce n'est que dans la seconde moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle que la figure des enseignants a été redéfinie dans sa forme et sa substance. L'enseignant est devenu une figure professionnelle formellement et substantiellement séparée de celle du chercheur. Cela n'impliquait pas que les deux rôles ne pouvaient plus coïncider dans une certaine mesure, ils le pouvaient certainement, mais l'enseignant a commencé à développer une expertise dans l'enseignement disciplinaire, tandis que le chercheur a conservé un rôle actif dans la recherche et la diffusion disciplinaires. Un autre élément étroitement lié au rôle de l'enseignant et ayant un fort impact sur le processus d'apprentissage est la manière dont l'action pédagogique est conçue, de l'unité d'enseignement à l'ensemble du cycle d'études. Au seuil du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle, les ressources pour les programmes d'enseignement des langues étrangères reposent encore principalement sur les certitudes conventionnelles d'un manuel, mais ne s'y limitent pas nécessairement. Traditionnellement, les manuels comportent un parcours programmé visant à guider les apprenants vers

une certaine maîtrise, dont le niveau est généralement codifié par le CECR. Il n'est pas rare, en particulier dans les écoles de langues, de voir le volume principal destiné à être utilisé en classe (souvent appelé *Student's book* in the West et 课本 *kèběn* en Chine) accompagné d'un deuxième volume pour la pratique individuelle (*Workbook*, ou 练习本 *liànxíběn*), qui montre généralement la même progression de contenu que le volume principal. De nombreux éditeurs occidentaux, ainsi que certaines maisons d'édition chinoises comme Hanban, Sinolingua et BLCUP, ont tendance à proposer un troisième volume, un guide de l'enseignant (教师本 *jiàoshīběn* ou 教师指南 *jiàoshī zhǐnán*), destiné à clarifier l'usage des deux volumes précédents et donner quelques conseils pour la pratique pédagogique. Suite à la numérisation des outils d'apprentissage, les pistes audio ont été progressivement intégrées ou, dans une certaine mesure, remplacées par des ressources disponibles sur Internet ou sous forme d'applications pour appareils personnels. Ils consistent principalement en des extensions d'enseignement, des unités approfondies ou des unités de rattrapage diffusées sur le net.

L'apprenant est à la fois le sujet de l'acquisition et la cible de l'activité d'enseignement. Sa figure et son rôle dans le processus d'acquisition ont subi un changement radical depuis la moitié des années 1990, notamment dans le sillage des théories psycholinguistiques développées à la fin du 20ème siècle. Au-delà des aspects didactiques, cognitifs et comportementaux, l'entité des facteurs contextuels et émotionnels ne doit pas être sous-estimée pour atteindre pleinement l'acquisition. En tant qu'intégration aux théories de Chomsky et Bruner, SD Krashen a observé que l'acquisition est pleinement réalisée dans des conditions d'apprentissage non stressantes, dans des conditions avec un limité «filtre affectif». D'autres théoriciens ont repoussé les limites de la recherche sur l'acquisition, remettant en question le fait que certains individus sont beaucoup plus efficaces dans l'acquisition que d'autres. Ce constat peut-il conduire à penser que les apprenants ont des aptitudes différentes à l'apprentissage des langues? En

d'autres termes, y a-t-il des preuves capables de prouver que quelqu'un est plus doué pour les langues que d'autres? La réponse à cette question est encore loin d'être exhaustive car elle fait partie d'un sujet très débattu, elle se situe sur une ligne de séparation très fine entre les études d'acquisition et les études psychologiques. Il est en effet très difficile de détecter le talent des apprenants pour une discipline en supprimant complètement toute interférence provenant du contexte ou du côté émotionnel. Le dernier élément qui vaut la peine de mentionner lorsque l'on aborde la dimension de l'apprenant est la motivation, un moteur puissant capable d'avoir un impact à la fois sur le processus et sur les résultats. On a pu constater que le modèle tripolaire de Balboni est probablement la définition la plus complète de la motivation, qui comprend à la fois les aspects liés à la sphère psycho-émotionnelle et les traits liés à la sphère rationnelle et sociale.

## **6. Analyse des approches, des pratiques et des matériaux**

L'approche pédagogique représente la question centrale autour de laquelle nos recherches ont été développées. Comme largement présenté dans la première partie de notre travail, la forme la plus traditionnelle d'enseignement des langues a été empruntée au monde classique. À partir du 17<sup>ème</sup> siècle, dans le sud de l'Europe, en particulier en Italie, un certain nombre de centres et d'universités ont commencé à se concentrer sur la langue en tant que discipline, probablement parce que la communication internationale en Europe a commencé à remplacer le latin par deux autres langues apprises : l'italien et le français. Le latin n'était plus la langue maternelle de personne mais il continua d'exister comme moyen de communication dans tous les cercles ecclésiastiques, qui étaient en effet assez impliqués dans l'éducation, les jésuites par exemple. Suite à l'évolution sociale, ces environnements ont accueilli l'avènement des langues modernes et, en tant que transfert naturel de modèles, les ont enseignées de la même manière que le latin pendant des siècles. Cette approche, alors appelée formalisme, a encadré l'enseignement des langues depuis plus de trois siècles et ses effets résiduels sont

toujours présents dans la plupart des pratiques pédagogiques d'aujourd'hui. Bien que la littérature s'accorde sur le fait que le formalisme a décliné entre la fin des années 1970 et le début des années 1980, nous soutenons l'idée qu'il a profondément influencé la philosophie de l'enseignement des langues en Europe et, bien qu'hybridé avec des approches ultérieures, de nombreuses traces sont encore présentes dans la plupart des manuels actuellement utilisés et dans plusieurs pratiques pédagogiques.

Le structuralisme, du nom des structures linguistiques de Bloomfield, était une approche de premier plan dans l'enseignement des langues tout au long des années 1950, qui avait son origine dans les théories de Skinner, Bloomfield et Lado. Le comportementalisme suppose que toute enquête analytique sur le comportement humain consiste nécessairement en ce qui peut être réellement observé. Pendant une longue période, cette théorie a été appliquée à un champ très large, car elle était capable d'expliquer un certain éventail de comportements humains, considérant chacun d'entre eux comme des réponses individuelles aux événements. Une enquête plus approfondie a mis en lumière les preuves importantes que le stimulus et la réponse étaient le couplet de base capable d'expliquer presque tous les changements dans le comportement humain. Cette hypothèse a affecté de nombreux domaines connexes, y compris l'éducation et la pédagogie, et est devenue un modèle de premier plan pour orienter l'attitude de l'enseignement. Le stimulus et la réponse sont devenus la théorie fondamentale du structuralisme et ont commencé à caractériser une série de stratégies d'enseignement conçues pour déclencher des réponses spécifiques chez les apprenants. Le structuralisme, en effet, a promu une méthodologie d'enseignement basée sur des exercices «structurels» appelés «*pattern drill*», dont l'importance a décliné à la fin des années 1950 et est revenue à la faveur après l'affirmation des neurosciences. L'exercice consiste en fait en des séquences stimulus-réponse-confirimation présentées en succession rapide, de sorte que les apprenants n'ont pas assez de temps pour développer une réflexion



consciente mais sont incités à activer une mémorisation spontanée. Bien que le structuralisme soit désormais perçu comme une méthodologie démodée, plutôt inadéquate pour répondre aux besoins d'apprentissage des langues vivantes, les exercices structurels restent une composante constante des manuels de langue étrangère et de la pratique quotidienne de l'enseignement. La raison se cache probablement derrière l'expérience des enseignants et des compileurs qui insistent sur la conviction que l'automatisation d'un processus est la clé du succès de l'apprentissage.

En ordre chronologique, la dernière approche qui a fortement façonné l'enseignement linguistique contemporain est l'approche communicative, initiée par la publication de «Comment faire les choses avec des mots» (Austin, 1962) et culminé avec «Speech Acts» (Searle, 1969). Ce moment a marqué un tournant dans ce qu'est une langue (en particulier une langue étrangère), en ce qu'une langue représente et implique pour un apprenant / locuteur. Les théoriciens et les praticiens de l'enseignement des langues étrangères sont passés de la concentration sur la structure de la langue (comment la langue est-elle fabriquée?) à une importance considérable pour l'application de la langue (que fait / peut la langue?). C'est en fait dans les années 1970 que les théoriciens, les rédacteurs de manuels, les concepteurs de cours, les enseignants et les instructeurs ont abandonné l'intérêt pour les formes de langage et ont commencé à classer les langues étrangères en objectifs pratiques réalisables grâce à une application appropriée et spécifique. En fait, dans de nombreux manuels de CLE publiés après le début des années 1990, les compileurs ont disséqué la langue cible en fonctions / objectifs et conçu des unités d'apprentissage en termes de compétence communicative. La notion de compétence a introduit une nouvelle façon de concevoir le comportement de l'enseignant et d'évaluer les objectifs d'apprentissage. Le niveau seuil est probablement le niveau de compétence le plus connu, né en 1975 et renommé B1 (utilisateurs indépendants) dans les années 90 après la définition des niveaux du CECR.

D'après les recherches menées sur les manuels de CLE actuellement utilisés dans les écoles secondaires, on a remarqué une légère divergence entre la façon dont les compilateurs français et italiens ont traduit l'approche communicative dans la pratique, souvent intégrée par la méthode situationnelle. En particulier, on a observé que dans les manuels français, comme les séries «Ni shuo ne», «Ni shuo ya» et «Ni shuo ba», les éléments attribuables à la méthode situationnelle et, plus généralement, conçus à des fins de communication sont plus nombreux et qualitativement plus pertinents que les éléments structurels. Une particularité que l'on peut voir dans les manuels italiens et français est la synergie entre une progression du niveau de langue et la présentation de situations sociolinguistiques en succession rapide. Cette technique est conçue pour déplacer les apprenants à travers un certain nombre de situations de la vie réelle d'un côté et pour promouvoir l'expansion du vocabulaire et la progression structurelle de l'autre. Les manuels basés sur cette méthode considèrent les éléments audio comme véritable source d'authenticité liant langage et contexte: ils contribuent à plonger les apprenants dans une atmosphère réaliste au moyen d'échanges verbaux, de sons de fond, d'accents, de tons et de timbres réalistes. En outre, les pistes audio sont généralement accompagnées d'un script ou font référence à un texte écrit, qui peut être utilisé comme banque de vocabulaire pour être consulté ultérieurement ou, dans le cas de dialogues, utilisé pour des activités de discussion ouverte et de jeu de rôle. Évidemment, tout manuel conçu dans une approche communicative (qu'il soit hybridé ou non) doit être soutenu et interprété par une action pédagogique cohérente. L'adoption de techniques spécifiques destinées à stimuler les actes de communication doit s'appuyer sur des situations sociolinguistiques appropriées programmées par l'enseignant et / ou présentées dans le manuel de cours. Partant de cette évidence, certaines franges de pragmatistes ont repoussé les limites de l'approche communicative plus loin que jamais. Leur hypothèse était que toute compétence ne pouvait être acquise que sous deux conditions : la première est que le processus d'apprentissage doit se dérouler dans le cadre d'une dimension authentique où les étudiants ont

l'opportunité d'être impliqués dans une tâche réelle (ou extrêmement réaliste) ; la deuxième suppose que les apprenants doivent s'attaquer à la tâche de manière pratique, obtenir un rôle actif dans l'apprentissage, en « faisant » quelque chose plutôt qu'en « sachant » quelque chose.

Bien que les recherches menées ces derniers temps aient révélé un fort progrès dans la méthodologie d'enseignement du CLE en Occident, les pays européens débattent encore des graves défis que certaines caractéristiques intrinsèques de la langue chinoise impliquent pour les apprenants, en particulier pour les jeunes apprenants. L'observation de classe et les enquêtes auprès des enseignants qu'on a menées entre 2017 et 2019 ont montré que les élèves trouvent particulièrement difficile et décourageant l'acquisition du système d'écriture chinois, en particulier des caractères chinois. Dans ce cas, la France et l'Italie présentent des panoramas différents. L'analyse croisée du Syllabus italien pour la langue chinoise et des indications nationales pour les programmes scolaires (publiées en 2010 et réadaptées en 2012) ne tient guère compte du fossé linguistique entre la langue maternelle et la langue chinoise, par conséquent presque aucune attention est prêtée aux problèmes que les étudiants doivent affronter lorsqu'ils commencent à étudier l'écriture, la phonétique et la morphologie chinoises. Historiquement, les caractères chinois ont toujours été un paramètre pour déterminer le niveau de compétence des locuteurs à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la Chine. Aujourd'hui encore, le seuil de compétence avancée en lecture et écriture chinoises est normalement représenté par la maîtrise d'environ 3000 caractères. Du point de vue de l'enseignement du CLE, cependant, les caractères sont signalés comme le plus grand obstacle à l'apprentissage, leur étude nécessite des capacités mnémotechniques qui peuvent être partiellement formées et développées. De plus, pour acquérir un bon niveau d'alphabétisation en chinois, les apprenants doivent faire face à une charge d'étude et à un temps d'apprentissage incomparables à ce qui est nécessaire pour les langues européennes. Compte tenu du défi difficile que représentent les caractères chinois, à la fin des années 1990

plusieurs compilateurs de manuels et universitaires ont commencé à affirmer que la langue chinoise pouvait être enseignée exclusivement grâce à l'utilisation du système de transcription phonétique (pinyin), surtout si elle était orientée vers des objectifs de communication. Cependant, la philosophie pédagogique traditionnelle continue de soutenir une approche «globale» où l'écriture, le son et la grammaire ont une dignité et une importance égales. Pour faciliter la mémorisation des caractères, les différentes communautés d'enseignants en Chine et à l'étranger ont élaboré quatre grandes stratégies: les listes de caractères ou mots, l'approche mnémotechnique, l'approche étymologique et l'approche contextuelle. Quant au modèle italien, la théorie basée sur les mots est la pratique la plus acceptée, qui a des manifestations claires dans la plupart des manuels de CLE conçus pour les apprenants italiens. En particulier, des listes de mots (生词表 shēngcíbiǎo) sont placées à la fin de chaque dialogue ou texte, et montrent en séquence les signes graphiques, la transcription phonétique, la catégorie de grammaire, la traduction italienne et l'exemple d'application de tout nouveau mot. Les listes de mots contiennent généralement des termes liés à une situation déterminée présentée dans le texte ou des termes qui peuvent être fonctionnels pour l'introduction d'un particulier sujet de grammaire.

Depuis que le CLE est devenu une matière formelle et standardisée dans les systèmes éducatifs italien et français, les apprenants ont été submergés par plusieurs clichés sur le système d'écriture chinois. Le plus courant est probablement l'idée que le chinois moderne comprend plusieurs milliers de caractères complètement différents les uns des autres. Mais la réalité est souvent très éloignée de la façon dont les élèves la comprennent. Par exemple, il est bien connu que 93% de tous les besoins de lecture et d'écriture peuvent être satisfaits en ne maîtrisant que 1500 caractères. De plus, le nombre total de graphèmes de base (unités essentielles de l'écriture chinoise moderne) peut être résumé en 400 unités et la plupart d'entre eux sont des caractères eux-mêmes. Bien que les caractères chinois soient de toute évidence un enjeu clé des processus

d'enseignement et d'apprentissage du CLE sous de multiples perspectives, il semble qu'aucune des principales approches traitées jusqu'à présent et actuellement adoptées en Europe ne leur donne l'importance qu'ils méritent. L'approche hybride, déjà analysée dans notre travail et contenant des éléments partiellement empruntés au formalisme, au structuralisme et à la méthode situationnelle est rebaptisée «méthode unipolaire» par Bellassen (2010). Il est composé d'unités comprenant un texte suivi d'une liste de mots, quelques explications grammaticales et les exercices correspondants. Cette méthode renforce l'idée que les élèves devraient apprendre à lire et à écrire tout ce qu'ils apprennent à dire. Le vocabulaire est présenté sous la forme de glossaires où les mots sont généralement listés selon l'ordre d'apparition dans le texte, on ne prête que peu d'attention aux composants graphiques comme si les caractères étaient aussi «transparents» que des combinaisons de lettres.

Quant au contexte italien, jusqu'à présent les approches d'enseignement et les manuels de chinois n'ont pas accordé une attention particulière aux méthodologies d'enseignement visant la mémorisation des caractères et le développement de la compétence écrite, les compilateurs et les enseignants ont en fait préféré une approche hybride combinant principalement l'approche communicative et le structuralisme. On suppose que cette attitude peut être due au manque de références solides dans la méthodologie d'enseignement, on doit en fait considérer que l'Italie a été le théâtre d'une évolution très rapide du CLE et que sa standardisation et sa disciplinarisation dans l'enseignement secondaire et universitaire sont des phénomènes relativement récents. La pratique de l'enseignement a révélé que les élèves atteignent les objectifs de communication beaucoup plus rapidement et plus facilement que les objectifs d'écriture, cela suggérerait de déconnecter l'acquisition de compétences en écriture de l'acquisition de compétences en expression orale. Cette théorie a pris forme en France dans la «Méthode de chinois - premier niveau» (I. Rabut) et dans «Le chinois... comme en Chine» (B. Allanic), deux approches innovantes qui

conseillent de prévoir un «décalage» dans le traitement de l'oral et de l'écriture ou, de façon plus radicale, créer une véritable «disjonction» entre les deux. Une autre méthode qui tente de définir une manière rationnelle de dissocier le développement des compétences en écriture des compétences en communication est celle conçue par Monique Hoa et bien présentée dans «C'est du chinois» (1999). Dans le manuel, les unités de communication et d'écriture, bien que faisant partie des mêmes modules, semblent sensiblement disjointes. La compétence orale, basée sur l'acquisition du vocabulaire et de la grammaire, occupe une position marginale, tandis que la compétence de base que le manuel vise à développer est la compétence d'écriture. Hoa demande aux apprenants d'observer et de comprendre les caractères et leurs composants, la technique qu'elle propose repose largement sur la mémorisation des graphèmes, leur disposition spatiale et, dans un second temps, sur leur combinaison.

Ayant déjà analysé en profondeur les aspects théoriques de la question, dans les dernières deux sections de notre recherche on s'est plutôt concentré sur les pratiques pédagogiques applicables au CLE. D'abord on a présenté une étude de cas où l'on a examiné l'impact de certains outils pédagogiques innovants (certaines plates-formes Web et applications numériques) sur les résultats d'apprentissage et sur l'acquisition des compétences spécifiques. Enfin, on a exploré la didactique du chinois dans trois différents contextes éducatifs: les cours universitaires pour spécialistes, les cours universitaires pour non-spécialistes et les cours du lycée. Suite à une longue observation, on a relevé une série de techniques et stratégies pédagogiques fonctionnelles à l'apprentissage du chinois et, en même temps, conçues pour répondre aux besoins spécifiques du contexte éducatif en question.

## **7. Conclusion**

Dans notre recherche, on a bien examiné la situation actuelle du CLE en Italie et en France à travers le prisme de deux processus qui ont soutenu la constitution du

CLE en tant que discipline. Le premier est l'institutionnalisation, qui peut être définie comme l'ensemble des actions extérieures visant à légitimer le CLE en tant que discipline et à assurer une reconnaissance dans les textes officiels. En ce sens, la mise en place de chaires dans les universités et les écoles, la création de qualifications pédagogiques spécifiques, l'activation des programmes académiques et scolaires, la publication de programmes nationaux, l'introduction du CLE à l'examen final du secondaire, la constitution d'associations et des équipes de recherche doivent être considérées comme des facteurs décisifs dans la définition de la position du CLE en tant que discipline. Nos recherches ont mis en évidence le fait que le CLE a connu un processus de démocratisation progressive dans les deux pays. Depuis sa première apparition au début du 19ème siècle en France et au milieu du 19ème siècle en Italie, le chinois est de moins en moins considéré comme une prérogative de spécialistes et d'universitaires et est progressivement devenu une discipline accessible à tous les niveaux d'enseignement. Malgré le degré de standardisation élevé atteint depuis la fin des années 1980, le CLE en France conserve encore une bonne marge d'innovation méthodologique comme, par exemple, la méthode de disjonction oral-écrit proposée par Monique Hoa et Bernard Allanic. Quant à l'Italie, notre analyse a révélé que le CLE a gagné au fil des années une position moins stable qu'en France. Une première raison peut être attribuée à l'absence d'une figure comme celle que Bellassen a longtemps incarnée en France. L'absence d'une référence nationale peut avoir attiré une attention insuffisante sur la question de la définition du CLE en tant que discipline scolaire. En Italie, les frontières de l'expérimentation méthodologique n'ont pas été repoussées aussi loin qu'en France, il serait donc très rare de voir des exemples d'innovation comme ceux proposés par Hoa ou Allanic. L'observation en classe, les enquêtes et la recherche théorique ont montré que la pratique de l'enseignement du CLE en Italie est encore profondément enracinée dans l'approche formaliste, les professeurs d'université et d'école font un usage intensif de techniques liées à la grammaire et à la traduction.